

## IN PREPARATION FOR THE 50<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT CONFERENCE – 06/20-23/2025

### CHRIST, OUR JUBILEE

WEEK 4 – MAY 26-31, 2025

#### Psalm 126: Christ, Our Restoration

The fourth week in the Preparation for the 50<sup>th</sup> District Conference has arrived, meaning we are only three weeks away from meeting at this historic Conference. How are you preparing for this year's Conference? Perhaps many believers have taken time off to attend the Conference, believers from states outside California have bought plane tickets, many believers may also be calling friends to arrange meetings at the Conference, and some may even be preparing a few new and beautiful outfits to attend the Conference...

All these preparations can bring our hearts *closer to the Conference* with both anticipation and excitement; however, what is more important is that we need to prepare our spirits to be able *to be closer to God*. May God grant each of us to take the opportunity of preparing for this Conference to meditate on God's Word, to understand more clearly the meaning of the Year of Jubilee, and to recognize clearly that Christ is the center and foundation in every aspect of our lives.

This week we will meditate on Psalm 126, a Psalm very familiar and beloved by God's children through the ages. Psalm 126 is not just the experience of the Jews exiled in Babylon returning to the Promised Land after 70 years of wearily waiting (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10), but this Psalm is also a clear image of the spiritual journey that every Christian goes through.

**THE JOY OF THE PAST** (verses 1-3). Even in the first three verses of this Psalm, the author recognized three important truths: first, they were merely "*captives*"; second, they could not escape this dark and humiliating situation by themselves; third, the only One who could free them from this condition of "*captivity*," the only One who could turn their dream into reality was the Lord.

This realization brought the author and all the Jews of that time into an experience of indescribable joy. They had left their beloved homeland in 586 B.C, on the journey of exile to Babylon with sorrowful faces, tears of pain, and heads lowered in shame (Psalm 137:1-5). Yet 70 years later, in the grace and faithfulness of the Lord, He led these "*captives*" to return back, causing "*our mouth was filled with laughter*" and "*our tongue with joyful shouting*" (verse 2). The Lord is the One who "*has done great things for us*" (verse 3), the One who causes "*my head will be lifted above my enemies around me*" (Psalm 27:6), causing the Gentiles to be amazed and say "*The Lord has done great things for them*" (verse 2). The rescue of the Jewish people by the Lord is a living testimony of a mighty, good, and faithful God, who can do things that are "*impossible with people*" (Mark 10:27).

The joy of the Jewish people came from the experience of deliverance along with their testimony of God's power and faithfulness must also be the experience and work of every believer and Church today. Each of us was formerly a "*captive*" under the power of darkness, people who "*following the prince of the power of the air... once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*" (Ephesians 2:2-4), but because of God's great love and abundant grace, He saved us, "*raised us up with him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 2:6). Furthermore, He brought the saved into an assembly where there were "*not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble*" (1 Corinthians 1:26), to become the Church that "*and the gates of Hades will not overpower it*" (Matthew 16:18).

This is the great thing that "*the Lord has done for us*". This is why "*we are glad*". This is what we must proclaim. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!

**LONGING IN THE PRESENT** (verse 4). The excitement and joy of being freed from bondage and returning home did not overshadow the difficult realities of the present – there were still "*captives*" in Babylon, enemies of God's people were still present in their homeland, and in front of their eyes, were wastelands and barren, abandoned fields. Facing these difficult realities, the freed Jews pleaded with the Lord to "*restore our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the South.*"

"*Restore our captivity*" may refer to the Jews who were still in Babylon because not all exiled Jews left Babylon. While many returned under the reign of King Cyrus (Ezra 1-3), others were later able to return under the reigns of King Darius (Ezra 6) and Artaxerxes (Ezra 7-8). However, this phrase also means, "*restore our fortunes*", the same phrase used when God gave Job back double what he had lost in the midst of his trial (Job 42:10). The people returning to their homeland was important, but equally important is that God bless their work (Psalms 127:1-2). God's people longed to receive complete restoration, not just a part, from God. They longed for more people to return to the Promised Land, and they longed for the nation to be restored from the ashes to become prosperous "*as the streams in the South.*"

"*The South*" is Negeb, a word that not only refers to direction, south, or geography, a southern region, but is also used to mean dryness. Negeb is also the name given to the parched region south of Judah towards the Sinai peninsula. It is a dry desert region that receives very little rain. However, on rare occasions during the winter months when rain falls on the northern highlands, small streams gather to form torrents rushing down from the hills, flooding the dry riverbeds with water that is abundant, sparkling, and refreshing. These downpours can turn the surrounding desert into a place of grass and flowers after one night. Likewise, God's people longed for Him to release a surprise rain with a flood of blessings on Israel to restore the prosperity of their people. The Jewish people longed to experience a miraculous deliverance "*like a dream*" to once again reoccur in their current difficulties.

Once again, we recognize the similarity between the restoration experience of the Israelites at that time with the restoration experience that God carries out in the lives of every believer and in the churches today. Although we have received the priceless gift of salvation from God, received the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, received new birth to live with a new nature (Romans 6:4; II Corinthians 5:17), and received assurance of salvation (Philippians 1:6), we still

live in the “*body of sin*” (Romans 6:6) and “*in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation*” (Philippians 2:15). Every day that passes is an intense spiritual battle that we must face with the enemy from outside (Ephesians 6:10-13), and also from within ourselves the “*body of sin*” (Romans 7:21-24).

And reasonably what we always long for and pray to God is each day to know Him more, be closer to Him, and be more like Him, that is the spiritual journey for us, the Church, and the District, to always be fresh “*as the streams in the South*” (verse 4). Don’t just live with past experiences, don’t try to seek and cultivate religious feelings, but long for a life renewed every day, long for God to “*bless me indeed and extend my border*” (1 Chronicles 4:10) so that through each of us, through the Church, through the District, many people will know Jesus, trust and worship Him more.

**EFFORTS FOR THE FUTURE** (verses 5-6). And longing must be expressed by action – “*faith without works is dead*” (James 2:26). God’s people recognized that they needed God’s grace in efforts to restore the nation despite the hardships around them and even when “*goes here and there weeping, carrying his bag of seed*” (verse 6). The Jews at the time had a broader view than the harsh reality before their eyes. They prayed for the Lord to bless and restore them, but they also recognized their responsibility – they knew that if they did not sow, they would not reap. They put in effort for themselves in the present and also for their descendants in the future. They put in effort not because they were confident in their own abilities, but because they knew who their God was, they knew He is mighty, loving, faithful, and good.

Some blessings God gave His people in unexpected ways (verses 1-3), some come over time (verse 4), and some come as we patiently sow and shed tears (verses 5-6), but His promise is certain, “*for in due time we will reap*” (Galatians 6:9). What are we sowing in the present? Always remember that “*whatever a man sows, this he will also reap*” (Galatians 6:7). In ancient Near Eastern culture, “*sowing*” was also an image of death, and Jesus also said that “*unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit*” (John 12:24). In spiritual meaning, if we do not “*by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body*” (Romans 8:13), we cannot experience a new and complete life. Paul also told the believers in Philippi to rely on the power of God, to will and with hearts of fear, to complete the salvation that He had given them through the death and resurrection of Jesus (Philippians 2:12-13).

Building a personally devout life is necessary to be able to build a healthy Church and District. We have died and been buried in unity with Christ, so we ask God to allow us to continue our new life in unity with Him. Let us think, act, and speak as a new people in Christ, people who live in submission to the Holy Spirit and His Word. Let us make an effort to “*sow*” the Word of God, good deeds, a model life so that in time we “*shall reap with joyful shouting*” (verse 5) and “*bringing his bag of seeds*” with joy (verse 6), so that many people will know Christ more, so that we can leave a spiritual legacy for the next generation.

Let us remember that the hardship and tears in the present should not be viewed as if they will continue forever; they are not the end, absolutely not, but are only means to a purpose. Tears are what we sow, but joy will be what we reap. If there is no sowing in tears, there will be no reaping in joy.

God, who did great things for the Israelites when He restored them, is also our God today, who gave His Son to die for us, and Christ today is still watching over our lives, He is “*the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls*” (1 Peter 2:25), the One who will lead us into joy in the process of sanctification, and “*when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory*” (1 Peter 5:4). We will receive joy right here on earth, and furthermore, complete joy when we reign with Him in the thousand-year Kingdom of Peace. Christ is the foundation of our restoration. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!

**PRAYER.** This week, let us offer words of thanks to God for the salvation He has given us. Let us thank God for knowing that the salvation He has given us is something we could not achieve on our own, something that without Him could only possibly be “*just a dream.*”

Let us pray for God’s blessing to pour down, overflowing in us individually, our families, our Church, and our District. Pray that God will grant us His grace to proclaim the Gospel to our own children and also to those who do not yet know Christ, that God will use us, our Church, and our District to expand His spiritual realm.

Let us spend special time praying for the youth in the District, praying that we may see the succeeding generations fear God, worship God, and serve Him.