

PSALM 126 - Sowing In Tears

Listen [this may be hard for you to hear], to be flat out honest, there have been times when I have succumbed to the Moses syndrom. Times when I have thought being in the ministry is not worth the pain and struggle that goes on inside me - times when I have had to force myself to give another minute to dealing with the mess some people make of their lives. It's then that Jesus makes me aware of the great difference between Him and Me. Where I have struggled to give one more minute of my time - He freely and willingly gave every ounce His strength. Every drop of His blood. Every inch of His love.

"Gospel tears are not lost" said Spurgeon. When it comes to the kingdom there is joyful return for tearful labor. But sometimes it takes all we have.

"Therefore my beloved brethren," echoes the apostle Paul, *"be steadfast immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord"* (1 Cor. 15:58).

Service in the kingdom is fraught with pain. There are discouraging times. Agony over sin. Tears shed over souls. Weeping over hardheartedness. Disappointment and betrayal. Persecution and poverty. Rejection and abandonment.

We must recognize a principle: joy comes on the other side of tears.

"Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."

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In a sermon entitled "God's Ways Are Unreasonable," missionary professor Del Tarr uses powerful illustration from West Africa (where he served fourteen years with the Assemblies of God)...

I grew up in a preacher's home in the little towns of Minnesota and South Dakota. I spent most of my free time with deacon's kids on John Deere tractors, International Harvesters, Cases,

Minneapolis-Molines. I learned how to drill oats, plant corn, and cultivate. And never once did I see a deacon behave like Psalm 126 says. What was there to weep about at sowing time?

I was always perplexed by this Scripture... until I went to the Sahel, that vast stretch of savanna more than four thousand miles wide just under the Sahara Desert, with a climate much like the Bible lands. In the Sahel, all the moisture comes in a four month period: May, June, July, and August. After that, not a drop of rain falls for eight months. The ground cracks from dryness, and so do your hands and feet. The winds off the Sahara pick up the dust and throw it thousands of feet into the air. It then comes slowly drifting across West Africa as a fine grit. It gets in your mouth. It gets inside your watch and stops it. It gets inside your refrigerator (if you have one).

The year's food, of course, must all be grown in four months. People grow sorghum or milo in fields not larger than this sanctuary. Their only tools are the strength of their backs and a short handled hoe. No Massey-Fergusons here; the average annual income is between eighty-five and one hundred dollars per person.

October and November... these are beautiful months. The granaries are full - the harvest has come. People sing and dance. They eat two meals a day - one about ten in the morning, after they've been to the field awhile, and the other just after sundown ...

December comes, and the granaries start to recede. Many families omit the morning meal. Certainly by January not one family in fifty is still eating two meals a day.

By February, the evening meal diminishes. People feel the clutch of hunger once again. The meal shrinks even more during March, and Children succumb to sickness. You don't stay well on half a meal a day.

April is the month that haunts my memory. The African dusk is quiet, you see... no jet engines, no traffic noises to break the stillness. The dust filters down through the air, and sounds carry for long distances. April is the month you hear the babies crying in the twilight... from the village over here, from the village over there. Their mothers' milk is now stopped.

Parents go at this time of year to the bush country, where they scrape bark from certain trees. They dig up roots as well, collect leaves, and grind it all together to make a thin gruel. They may pawn a chair, a cooking pot, or bicycle tires in order to buy a little more grain from those wealthy enough to have some remaining, but most often the days are passed with only an evening cup of gruel.

Then, inevitably, it happens. A six-or seven-year-old boy comes running to his father one day with sudden excitement. "Daddy! Daddy! We've got grain!" he shouts.

"Son, you know we haven't had grain for weeks."

"Yes, we have!" the boy insists. "Out in the hut where we keep the goats- there's a leather sack hanging up on the wall - I reached up and put my hand down in there - Daddy, there's grain in there! Give it to Mommy so she can make flour, and tonight our tummies can sleep!"

The father stands motionless.

"Son, we can't do that," he softly explains. "That's next year's seed grain. It's the only thing between us and starvation. We're waiting for the rains, and then we must use it." The rains finally arrive in May, and when they do, the young boy watches as his father takes the sack from the wall... and does the most unreasonable thing imaginable. Instead of feeding his desperately weakened family, he goes to the field and - I've seen it - with tears streaming down his face, he takes the precious seed and throws it away. He scatters it in the dirt! Why? Because

he believes in the harvest.

The seed is his; he owns it. He can do anything with it he wants. The act of sowing it hurts so much that he cries. But as the African pastors say when they preach on Psalm 126, "Brothers and sisters, this is God's law of the harvest. Don't expect to rejoice later on unless you have been willing to sow in tears."

... And I want to ask you: How much would it cost you to sow in tears?

Jesus said, “*Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh*” (Lk. 6:21). DO YOU NEED YOUR JOY RESTORED? Learn the lessons of Psalm 126. The joy of the *Lord* is your strength. It was in the past; it is now, and it will be tomorrow.