

Psalm 126 | “He Has Done Great Things!”  
*Preached on December 22, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown*

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Psalm 126, as we continue our study in the ‘songs of ascents’, which were the songs that the Israelites sang as they traveled to worship at the Temple.  
*[pauseeeee]*

There are a lot of great things around Christmas time, aren’t there? *[pause]*

Spending time with family is great, giving and receiving presents is great, the lights are great, and so on. *[pause]*

It’s around Christmas that we experience many things that cause us to say, “That was great!”  
*[pauseeee]*

We walk out of an amazing Christmas concert and say, “That was great, wasn’t it?!” *[pause]*

We drive through a nativity or Christmas light display and we say the same thing.

We go to a Christmas party, and leave thinking about how amazing it was. *[pausee]*

Those experiences cause us to have joy, but then we also go through some things that cause us to think that way about what another person does for us. *[pause]*

Maybe someone gives you such a costly, thoughtful gift, and you can’t help but think, “Wow, what they did for me was so great, I don’t even feel deserving of such kindness.” *[pauseeee]*

These things gladden our hearts, and bring us great joy, and sometimes we are amazed by the great things that we experience around this time of year. *[pauseeee]*

All of those things are truly great, but did you know that each of those great things are only a flicker of light compared to the blazing brightness of God’s great deeds? *[pause]*

The great things that we experience this time of year should point us upward to the One whose greatness they reflect.

That’s what we are going to do this morning, we are going to look beyond the greatness of the blessings of the Christmas season to see the greatness of God, who makes it all possible.  
*[pauseeee]*

Look down at Psalm 126 as I READ it for you. *[READ]*

Now this psalm definitely had a historical context that it was written in, as is evidenced by the content of the psalm, so let’s think about that first. *[pause]*

Most often when we think about the psalms, we think that they were all written around David’s time, but that’s not true. *[pause]*

While most of them were, there were some psalms written later on, like this one. *[pause]*

If you remember, Israel was in exile in Babylon for around 70 years, and that was hard to go through, I'm sure. *[pause]*

They were in captivity, and their nation was in shambles, but then in amazing grace, God started bringing back His people to their land. *[pause]*

He stirred up King Cyrus of Persia to allow streams of people to start coming back and rebuilding the Temple,<sup>1</sup> and then they ended up rebuilding the walls under Nehemiah. *[pause]*

It's that release from captivity and beginning of the restoring of Israel's fortunes that the psalmist seems to be talking about. *[pauseeee]*

There's *great joy* in this psalm, as the psalmist thinks about this fact.

It's hard for us to even imagine the joy that a nation would feel after being captive for decades.

And now, they went from captivity and darkness to release and bright hope. *[pauseeee]*

To get just a small glimpse of this, think about being a prisoner of war during World War 2, and then finally being released. *[pause]*

Commentator Donald Williams shares some of what that was like for them, when he says...

“After years of internment, after daily inspections, bad food, boards for bunks in steamy, overcrowded dorms, after interrogation, intimidation, and genuine fear of torture, disease, and even death, suddenly the guards and their dogs were gone. *[pause]*

The watchtowers stood deserted, and the hated gates made of barbed wire yawned open. *[pause]*

Freedom beckoned these men, and their memories of home lured them into reality once again. *[pause]*

In their shock and surprise, there was still a joy unspeakable as the tanks rolled in and the Nazis faded away, sneaking into the night.”<sup>2</sup> *[pauseeee]*

It's that kind of feeling—that kind of joyous freedom of release from captivity and the hope of what's to come, that the psalmist is talking about here.

And that's why he can't help but rejoice in the great things that God has done. *[pauseeee]*

*We see point #1 this morning, and it's...*

### **I. Take joy in the Lord who has done great things! (1–3)**

<sup>1</sup> See Ezra 1:1–4.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Williams and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Psalms 73–150*, vol. 14, *The Preacher's Commentary Series* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1989), 408.

For Israel, the Lord had done something so great, so amazing, and so joy-inducing that it says that they “were like those who dream”. *[pauseee]*

Have you ever experienced something so great that you wondered, “Am I dreaming?! Is this real?!” *[pausee]*

I remember thinking that way on the night before my wedding...

It felt like a surreal experience when I was like, “Is this real? Am I really getting married tomorrow!?” *[pause]*

You almost feel like pinching yourself to make sure it’s not a dream because it’s so exciting, so happy, so great. *[pauseee]*

What were those moments for you? *[pause]*

Was it your wedding day or graduation day? *[pause]*

Was it when you attended that once-in-a-lifetime event or took that once-in-a-lifetime trip? *[pause]*

Was it when you stood in front of that wonder of nature, and it just felt so hard to believe it was real? *[pause]*

Well that’s what Israel felt when they were released from Babylonian captivity—it felt like a dream because it felt almost too good to be true. *[pause]*

Their mouths were filled with laughter, their tongues with shouts of joy, for the Lord had done great things for them. *[pauseeeee]*

When you think about it, we are in the same spot—the Lord has done great things for us! *[pause]*

We have not been released from Babylonian captivity, but through Christ, we have been released from sin and death’s captivity. *[pause]*

How could our mouths not be filled with joy-filled praise?!

How could we not feel like it’s so good that it almost feels like we are dreaming? *[pauseee]*

Due to our rebellion against God, our relationship with Him was severed and it’s like we were in exile and in slavery to sin and death. *[pause]*

We couldn’t break free on our own, or fix the relationship ourselves, so God sent Jesus Christ to take on flesh and dwell among us, so as to go and die for us, in our place. *[pause]*

He paid for our sins on the Cross, and then rose against victoriously, so that we could be restored back in our relationship with the Lord.

Talk about “great things”! *[pauseeee]*

*He has done great things for us.*

It wasn't us, but it was the Lord, for it *had* to be! *[pause]*

We couldn't save ourselves, we couldn't forgive our own sin, we couldn't beat death in our own power.

*He* had to do it, and the Incarnation of Christ is evidence of that. *[pause]*

God showed that He was in control the whole time, just like He was in Israel's captivity and release. *[pause]*

The Lord had to intervene, and He did so in Bethlehem.

God the Son came down to this earth, took on humanity without losing His divinity, and was born in a manger. *[pause]*

He came to save, release, and give life.

Truly, the Lord *has done* great things—He acted. *[pause]*

He acted in power and in love.

He didn't sit back, but worked His miraculous, great deeds through Christ. *[pauseee]*

The birth of Jesus is proof that the Lord *does* great things. *[pause]*

We don't serve the Lord of deists, who creates the world, and then just sits back like a clockmaker. *[pause]*

We don't serve a Lord, who sits with His arms crossed and says, “You do it all yourselves, you made this mess, you know.”

No, we have a Lord, who humbled Himself and came in love for sinful people like us. *[pauseeee]*

He acts!

He has acted in love in Bethlehem, He has acted in love on Calvary, He has acted in love in the empty tomb, He acts in love now at the right hand of the Father interceding for us, and He will act again when He comes again to rule and reign. *[pauseeee]*

He truly does *great* things, but why are they so great? *[pause]*

First, because often He does *supernatural* things. *[pause]*

He does things that no mere human could ever do—He works miracles like the virgin birth, the resurrection, or even our regeneration.

He took us who were dead and made us alive in Him<sup>3</sup>—now that’s a great thing! *[pauseeee]*

The things the Lord does are also great because they are *sizable* things. *[pause]*

Releasing a nation from captivity was not a small thing, but a sizable one.

Likewise, saving people from every tribe, tongue, and nation is a sizable thing.

But what else would we expect from our God, who no size could fit because He’s too big to ever contain? *[pauseeee]*

His great things are great because they are also *significant* things. *[pause]*

He saves, delivers, gives new life, and forgives—each thing is significant because they impact our eternity.

Whatever the Lord does is significant. *[pause]*

He makes no mistakes, He doesn’t do any needless things or flippant things. *[pause]*

When God acts, it’s significant, and what’s more significant than how He reached down in grace to save sinners? *[pause]*

His great things are significant things, for they are saving things.

And His great things are *special* things. *[pauseee]*

He does great things for His people, just like here with how He restored the fortunes of Zion for Israel. *[pause]*

These special things are filled with love, wrapped with grace, and tied with a bow of mercy.

You see when the psalmist speaks of the great things that the Lord has done, as New Testament believers, we can’t but think of Christ. *[pause]*

The gift of Christ is the greatest thing that the Lord has done for the world. *[pauseeee]*

When Mary visits Elizabeth in Luke chapter 1, she bursts into praise due to being chosen as the one who would give birth to Jesus.

And she proclaims, “he who is mighty *has done great things for me*”<sup>4</sup>! *[pause]*

Then a little further on we see that those great things aren’t just because the Lord looked on her humble estate, but because He looked on Israel and helped Israel “in remembrance of his mercy”.<sup>5</sup> *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>3</sup> A reference to Ephesians 2:5.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 1:49 (italics is mine).

<sup>5</sup> Luke 1:55–56.

But there's more connections between Psalm 126 and the Incarnation, for we see that the coming of Jesus is a great thing done by God for His people's *restoration*. [pauseeee]

When the father of John the Baptist, Zechariah, prophesies in Luke 1, he says of this good news, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, *for he has visited and redeemed his people.*"<sup>6</sup> [pause]

When Jesus is brought to the Temple after He is born, Simeon is said to be "waiting for the consolation of Israel," and rejoices because his eyes have seen the Lord's salvation.<sup>7</sup> [pause]

And when Anna the prophetess comes into the Temple, we are told that she "began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were *waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.*"<sup>8</sup> [pauseeee]

Jesus' arrival was seen as God beginning His work of redemption and restoration. [pauseeeee]

The Incarnation of Christ is a great thing that the Lord has done—this is what we celebrate at Christmas! [pause]

Every Christmas is a reminder that the Lord does great things!! [pause]

As we enjoy the greatness of the season, it should point us towards the greatest thing that the Lord has done—giving us Christ, who would die and rise again for us. [pause]

You see, God's great things should lead us to joyous astonishment.

We should feel like we are dreaming because it's almost too good to be true. [pauseeee]

We should be astonished *at His greatness*, for He has done so much for us, and "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think."<sup>9</sup> [pause]

We should be astonished *at His grace*, for though we sinned against Him, He reached down in love through the gift of Jesus, and then Jesus went so far in grace as to be nailed to a cross of wood for us. [pauseeeee]

We should be joyfully astonished at the truth of the Incarnation.

I mean it's so amazing, it feels like we are dreaming when we truly dwell upon it—God took on flesh and was born in a manger. [pause]

If you don't feel like you are dreaming sometimes when you think of that, then you haven't thought about it long enough. [pauseeeee]

Like the psalmist, God's great things should lead us to joyous exultation.

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 1:68 (italics is mine).

<sup>7</sup> Luke 2:25–32.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 2:38 (italics is mine).

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 3:20.

We should have a “can’t-contain-it-in joy”. *[pauseee]*

If there’s anyone in the world whose mouth should be filled with laughter, and whose tongue should be filled with shouts of joy, it’s us. *[pause]*

Every look upon Jesus should be joy-inducing, for it’s a look at the Lord’s greatest thing done. *[pauseeee]*

There’s something else found in verses 1–3, which is so amazing. *[pause]*

In verse 2, the psalmist says, “then they said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’” *[pausee]*

God’s great work on behalf of Israel was recognized by the surrounding pagan nations!

They couldn’t help but admit that the Lord had done great things for Israel. *[pause]*

God had worked so powerfully and so amazingly that the unbelieving world couldn’t help but take notice! *[pauseeee]*

It’s really the Lord’s great work in our lives that leads unbelievers to take notice. *[pause]*

Peter says, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”<sup>10</sup>

And Jesus says that we are supposed to be lights in the world that shine, “so that [people] may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”<sup>11</sup> *[pauseeee]*

God’s work in our lives should be so evident in how we live that even unbelievers take notice. *[pause]*

They should be able to look at our lives, and think, “How do they live that way? They are just so kind, so loving, and so joyous even when such bad things happen to them.” *[pauseeee]*

Our lives should be like big signs indicating that the Lord has done great things here. *[pause]*

Our lives should be a testament to His great work, so much so that those who don’t know Christ take notice, and can’t help but admit, “Only God can do that with a life.” *[pauseeee]*

God’s great things reach out in love towards us and give us joy, but His great things also reflect off of us and shine back to His glory.

So also, the Incarnation of Jesus shows God’s greatness coming to earth in love, but it’s also God’s greatness reflecting off of the earth and back towards Heaven to display His glory and love. *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 2:12.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 5:16.

Take joy in the great things that the Lord has done for you! *[pause]*

Rejoice in His greatness, His grace, His love, His glory. *[pause]*

If you have trusted in Christ, He has restored back your relationship with God—you are forgiven, made right in His sight, and loved as a child.

Rejoice! Be glad! You serve and follow the Lord who has done great things for you! *[pauseeee]*

Now as we look more into this psalm, we see a very distinct difference between verses 1–3 and 4–6. *[pause]*

In verses 1–3, the psalmist rejoiced in the Lord’s *past* work, but now in verses 4–6, he looks with faith to the Lord’s *future* work.

*And this shows us that we are to...*

## **II. Trust that the Lord will do great things again. (4–6)**

Have you ever wondered if something good would happen again? *[pause]*

Maybe one time you hit every green light while driving, and you are wondering, “Is it going to happen again because that was great.” *[pause]*

Or maybe it’s the fact that your blood work at the doctor’s office came back super good last time, but now you are sitting there waiting to hear the most recent lab results, thinking, “Will it happen again? I sure hope so.” *[pause]*

Israel here in Psalm 126 is like that, but their desire for God to work again is not wishful thinking or an unsure desire.

Their trust and hope is based on the character and past work of the God, who had done great things for them before. *[pauseeee]*

You see, in verse 1, the psalmist explains that the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, and now here in verse 4, he asks the Lord, “Restore our fortunes.” *[pause]*

So what’s going on here?

Well Israel had experienced the restorative work of God in their nation, as the people began to come back to the land, yet it was only the beginning...

There was still much to be done to get back to their previous state, so that’s why the psalmist asks for God to restore their fortunes. *[pauseeee]*

Israel was living in the already–not yet tension that God’s people often live in. *[pause]*

God had already begun restoring them, yet it was not fully complete. *[pause]*



Though they rejoiced in what the Lord had done, yet they were still in a situation that felt barren, like a desert in some ways.

And that's why he says in verse 4 for the Lord to restore their fortunes "like streams in the Negeb!" *[pause]*

The Negeb was the southern part of Judah that was very dry, and yet when lots of rain would come through, it would all of a sudden create streams in the desert.

So that's what the psalmist is asking for, "Lord, create streams of blessing in the desert!"

And then he ends on a confident note of how the Lord would turn their tears into shouts of joy. *[pauseeee]*

Do you ever feel like the psalmist, where you feel that tension of living in the already—not yet of the Christian life? *[pause]*

It's like we have seen and experienced God do some amazing things in our lives—He has saved us, redeemed us, forgiven us, and brought us out of darkness—yet everything doesn't feel done yet. *[pause]*

You still struggle with sin, you still face lots of hardships, you still experience pain and hurt, and you long for it all to be made right. *[pauseeee]*

Behind you are those glorious great things done by the Lord, but right now all you can see is the desert in front of you. *[pause]*

Looking back, you see the amazing things done by the Lord, but right now you are looking through tears of sorrow. *[pauseeee]*

What's your response to that tension? *[pause]*

Do you give in and say, "God won't do anything anymore, just look around!" *[pause]*

Do you despair and say, "Why won't He just work again? I give up."

Or like the psalmist do you say in faith, "Lord, work again!" *[pauseeee]*

The main question is, will you walk by faith or walk by sight?

Will you think that the desert will remain a desert forever, or do you believe that the Lord can turn it into a garden? *[pause]*

Will you think that those tears will flow forever, or do you believe that He can turn those tears sown in sorrow into a harvest of joy? *[pauseeee]*

What made the difference for the psalm writer here?

It was by reflecting on the Lord's *past* work that led the psalmist to faith in the Lord's *future* work. *[pause]*

Because the Lord began to restore, so now he can ask the Lord again to restore. *[pausee]*

His past work should propel us onward in trust now, and a big way that we demonstrate that trust is through prayer. *[pause]*

The psalmist *prays* to the Lord to work. *[pause]*

Instead of grumbling, doubting, or any of that—he took his request to the Lord, and there's no better place to take it! *[pause]*

If you are feeling that desert or experiencing those tears, go to the throne of grace, there's help there.<sup>12</sup> *[pause]*

Place your hope in the Lord's future grace, remembering that the God who “has done” continues “to do” and “will do” even more. *[pauseee]*

Now all of this doesn't mean it's going to be easy...

We are going to have to trust God in the desert, and trust Him through the tears, but He's *trustworthy*, for just consider the great things that He has done. *[pauseee]*

*It will be hard*, like those who sow in tears going out bearing the seed for sowing, but in the end, we shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing in the sheaves. *[pauseeee]*

So yes, there's present toil, but there can be present faith along with that toil. *[pauseeee]*

*It will also take time*, for the harvest doesn't come right now, so as Paul tells us, “Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”<sup>13</sup>

But it will be worth it. *[pause]*

Someday there will be a great reversal of our tears of sorrow in this sin-cursed world, for they will be wiped away.<sup>14</sup>

And as Jesus says, “Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.”<sup>15</sup> *[pause]*

He's truly the God who can turn deserts into gardens, seeds into sheaves, and sorrow into joy.<sup>16</sup> *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>12</sup> A reference to Hebrews 4:16.

<sup>13</sup> Galatians 6:9.

<sup>14</sup> A reference to Revelation 21:4.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 6:21.

<sup>16</sup> A reference to John 16:20.

If you have ever experienced a great reversal of a situation in your life, you know the joy that comes along with that. *[pause]*

Maybe it was that relationship that you truly thought would never be mended, and it was restored. *[pause]*

Maybe it was that cancer diagnosis that you thought would be your end, but then the doctor said the word, “remission”. *[pause]*

Those things bring us great joy, and they should cause us to remember that that’s how God works.

He reconciles, redeems, and restores...

*He flips the script by intervening and doing a “great thing”, and those....*

**Great things that the Lord has done should propel us forward in faith.**

This week as we celebrate Christmas, we are celebrating the coming of Christ to be born in this world in order to save us from our sins.

Now that’s truly “good news of great joy,”<sup>17</sup> but have you trusted that greatest news ever?  
*[pause]*

If you have, you can be assured of forgiveness and eternal life, but if you have *never* trusted in Christ, then you are still in your sins and under condemnation.

So believe today, and find life in Christ. *[pauseeee]*

Truly, the Lord has done great things for us, but dwell upon them again and again.

Use this time as a way to look back in order to look forward. *[pause]*

Remember the great thing that God has done in sending His Son to this earth, and let it propel you onward in faith today and everyday afterwards.

For if God has done *that*, then how could I doubt or fret today?

No wonder Paul can say in Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” *[pauseeee]*

We truly do serve a God who “has done”, “does”, and “will continue to do” great things for us!

He will complete what He started in us,<sup>18</sup> and someday the God who restored our relationship with Himself through Christ will restore all things.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Luke 2:10.

<sup>18</sup> A reference to Philippians 1:6.

<sup>19</sup> See Acts 3:21.