Look Both Ways - Mr Scott Macleod

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Date: 03 May 2026

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[0:00] When we turn back to that psalm that we read, Psalm 126, we look at the whole psalm. Psalm 126, we'll read at verse 4.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev. You'll notice that if you look at this psalm, it says a song of ascents at the beginning.
That's the subtitle of it. So there are the psalms that they would have sung as they traveled to Jerusalem at festival time. As they traveled up to Jerusalem, it was an elevated city.
So these are the songs that they would sing as they traveled together, as they went. You can imagine all the tribes and all the people coming together and singing these songs, encouraging each other as they ascended up to Jerusalem with a great anticipation of coming to worship God.
And I suppose I liken it to a modern equivalent today, which is far from worshiping God, but it sort of paints a picture.
[1:14] It's that if you imagine football teams traveling to a stadium, coming in their droves, meeting together on their way, caught up in the desire to get to that place, to almost satisfy their, it's called maybe worship, in their own sense.

But they're singing their anthems as they go, singing the anthems of their team, longing to be at this place together.
So these psalms, they would have been anthems for the people to sing as they made their journey, as they traveled along the way, as they struggled on together, almost desiring to get to Jerusalem.
But in many ways, they're actually anthems for the church. Even today, these Song of Ascents, they're more well known, we would say, than possibly some of the other psalms.
You think of Psalm 121, I to the hills. Psalm 122, I joined into the house of God. Psalm 130, Psalm 133, 126, as we have here.
[2:37] But there's psalms that we come back to again and again in our experience. There's psalms that we sing together as we join together to worship God. There's psalms worth memorizing.

There's psalms worth recalling. It's almost as if they stir us up in our own journey. As we strive on to our heavenly city.
And the eternal worship of God. And all that means for the Lord's people. So stopping to study them is hugely beneficial for us.
And actually to discover the meaning and the imagery that is included here in these psalms. Psalm that I had often sung. And I didn't really understand the imagery of it.
I remember looking at Psalm 133 and thinking about the oil that was poured on Aaron's head. I'm thinking about the Jew of Mount Hermon. And when you stop and dwell on that psalm, it just illuminates the meaning of it.
[3:44] And so I hope that as we look at Psalm 126 together. Again, I didn't understand fully the imagery I was used in. But when we do, it's hugely beneficial for us to see what's been meant here.

And what's been expressed in these anthems. That they would have come back to again and again in their own experiences. So they're all the more meaningful for us.
And we understand what we're singing as we join together as we do tonight. So with that in mind, this psalm, we can say there's two viewpoints really in this psalm.
That'll break up this psalm for us into two sections. There's a viewpoint of looking back in verses 1 to 3. And there's a viewpoint of looking forward in verses 4 to 6.
The psalmist looks back to recall the work of their God. But also he prayerfully looks forward from the situation he is in.

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[4:54] Calling for God to be at work. So we'll begin by looking back and consider what's been said there in verses 1 to 3.

Now for the Christian, looking back at the works of God will shape how we look forward in our lives. For today, looking back will shape how we look forward.
And this psalm, it recalls a specific event of, that's why we read in Ezra. The return of the exiled nations from Babylon back to Jerusalem.
They had been taken away, they had been captured by Nebuchadnezzar, held captive for 70 years in this land until Cyrus allowed them to return.
Saying that they could return home to Jerusalem. This is what verse 1 remembers. When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion.
[5:55] The King James Version, it worded slightly differently. The Lord turned again our captivity. Turned us from captivity. Restoring our fortunes.

Restoring us home. Restoring us to Zion. Which means the city of Jerusalem for the singer. They're returning from captivity.
They're returning home. Returning to Jerusalem. Returning to the place that's been blighted. Destroyed.
And they're coming to restore it to what it once was. To rebuild the temple. To rebuild the city in its entirety.
To bring the people back together. Together. You may be familiar with the term people make Glasgow. But I suppose you could apply that to any place really, couldn't you?
[7:05] In Scalpy. The people make Scalpy. In Barvis. The people make Barvis. The people are a huge part of the place. And so the people returning to Jerusalem.

Is restoring the place to what it once was. But the Lord's people, taken from captivity. Being restored to Jerusalem. Restores Zion.
Restores the place. When you take the people out of a place. If you ripped all the people out of Barvis. Put them up to Calanish.
Barvis wouldn't be the same. It just wouldn't be the same. The life would be ripped out of it. And so. When the people come back.
The life is brought back. The meaning is restored. And so they describe this. This song describes this great homecoming.
[8:12] Remembering it. As it says here. As a dream. We were like those who dream. And when we read in Esther.

I said. Take note of what they returned with. They didn't return empty handed. Did they? They returned with. Gold. Silver. Beasts.
They had all the temple vessels. The great number of them. To take with them. It was more than they could have probably imagined.
It was great just to. Get to return to Zion. To get to return to Jerusalem. In and of itself. But. But to take home the. The temple treasure.
To take home. The silver and gold. And to be blessed. With these material possessions. It was. Who would have thought? It was like a dream.
[9:13] That situation. Is not what they thought. Would have happened. And so they composed. The songs. Well. To remember it. That it's never forgotten. That it is a wonderful work.

Of God. Drawing his people. Back from captivity. And blessing them. In such a way. That they could come. And worship him.
In his city. Once more. And as the psalmist. Writes this song. He recalls. Two responses.
In this first section. He recalls. The response of Israel. Our mouths. Were filled with laughter. And our tongues.
With shouts of joy. It's a picture of. Rejoicing. Absolute joy.
[10:11] It's a picture of. If you're watching a war film. Of. The announcement of the war ending. The announcement of. The second world war. The Germans being defeated.

And you picture the soldiers. Rejoicing. And the praise. And joy. And the. Happiness. That is in that picture. Returning home. To be with the people.
It's that. Uncontainable joy. Bursting out of. Laughing. And singing. Coming home.
With these riches. Praising God. For his great. Great. Works. But there's a second response.

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Recorded. And it says. What the nations said. Then they said. Among the nations. The Lord has done.
[11:09] Great things. For them. It's as if the world. Is looking on at this moment. And they're acknowledging.

The Lord has done. Great things. For them. They too acknowledge. It is the hand of God. At work. Restoring them. And bringing them back.
Who else could do it? They're nations. That knew the power. Of Babylon. They knew the absolute. Emptiness of Jerusalem. They knew the plight.
Of the people. For 70 years. And they're watching them. Coming back. Singing. Rejoicing. With the animals.
With the treasures. Who could have done. A work. Like this. But the Lord. They're hearing them.
[12:10] Singing their songs. They're witnesses. To that. Undeniable. Joy. In their hearts. And they would watch.

And say. You know. Their God. Has been faithful to them. Yes. They have been taken away. And exiled. Into slavery.
But God. Has been faithful to them. In their difficulties. They've trusted God. God.
Has proven faithful. He brings them back. With joy. Out of their suffering. Out of their captivity. To the worship of God.
In Jerusalem. God. So. If they stand. At a distance. And they're watching. These things. Unfold. At all.
[13:10] But it's not. Applying to them. They're standing. And watching. From a distance. They're keeping. Themselves. Separate. From the Lord's.

People. And maybe you're here. Maybe in like manner. Tonight. Maybe you've seen the Christian. Rejoicing. Maybe you've seen the Christian. Going through suffering. Going through ordeals.
Going through hard and painful circumstances. And you've watched them. And you've seen their hearts.
And you've seen their faithfulness. And they've seen their loyalty to the Lord. And you've seen them maybe reading their Bibles. Every day. Maybe you've seen them coming to church faithfully.
[14:11] Every Sunday. And you're wondering. Why do they keep coming? When they've suffered so much. And they've been through so much. They know that their God is faithful.

They know that they can trust their God. And maybe it's plain for you to see. Their own faithfulness. Plain today. That you see in their lives. A joy that you can't deny. It's as if these weights and burdens.
That they've been under. Don't affect them. The same as me. And you can only acknowledge and say.
It's been God. That's been keeping it. The Lord has done great things for them. In many ways.
[15:23] We would be right to think like that. The Lord keeps us. The Lord protects us. The Lord sustains us. When we trust in him. But the Christian is.

Set free from a captivity. A Christian does not have the bondage of sin over him. Anymore. You remember the picture of Pilgrim's Progress.
Of Christian coming to the cross. And the burden on his back of sin. That weighed him down. He battled to carry. And he wished it was set free from him.
He comes to the cross. And it's rolled away. It's taken from him. He's set free from that weight. And that bondage. A new song is in his heart.
As the Lord heard his cry. The Lord hears the cry of his people. He sets them free from that weight of sin. That holds them captive.
[16:31] He heard them confessing their sin. And he has forgiven them. Of that burden. That weight.

And they have a new song to sing. Do you not desire this gift for yourself? If you have not experienced.
Do you not desire this song to be your song? Knowing that the Lord has set you free from the captivity of sin.
Knowing that you can trust in him. In the midst of difficulties. And all circumstances. Knowing that he.
Will do great things for you. They look back. To the source of their joy.

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[17:38] The Christian. They look back. To Jesus Christ. Who has set them free. They look back.

To his work. He has restored and rescued them. That they might come and dwell in this heavenly city.
He died to set each of us free. From the captivity of sin. He has taken our sin.
And he has disposed of it. And in him you will find your freedom and your joy. He takes that burden from you.
And you are back. And you can sing that the Lord has done great things for me. You will sing it with wonder.
[18:51] You will sing it with awe. That he would ever set you free. From such captivity. You will sing a new song.

With the people of God. It's a personal expression of the heart. But it's collective as a community as well.
We sing this song in our own hearts. We sing this song together as the Lord's people. But maybe if you're of a certain age.
When you look back. It's. It's what you see. You look back in the years of your experience. And you recall times when God was good.
You can recall looking back. And seeing the Lord restoring. The people in amazing and miraculous ways.
[20:00] Years past you witnessed the hand of God in revival. You saw one by one being called. Out of that captivity of sin.

And you laughed and you sang with them. Your hearts were full of joy when you saw them coming. One by one.
You couldn't believe even that such people would come. It was as if it were a dream that they would come at all. That they would come into this heavenly kingdom.
You saw it happen. You can recall these experiences. You can recall the people singing together. But now it seems like a distant memory.
You look back and it does actually seem like a dream. You look back and you say. I haven't seen God work like this since.
[21:08] You look back. You look back. You look back glad for knowing these experiences. Glad to recall these experiences. Glad knowing the blessings of that experience and these times.

Thankful for all he did. But now as you look forward. It's not the same, is it? You look back.
You recall the great blessings. But you look forward and you think it's, well, it's not the same. It takes us to our second point. We've looked back.
But now we look forward with the psalmist. And as we said, for the Christian, looking back at the works of God will shape how we look forward in our lives.
The psalmist here in verse 4 says, Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.
[22:09] The psalmist now changes to pray to God, to petition God, to call on the same God, to call on the same Lord.

You'll notice that the same language is used between verses 1 and verse 4. Restore our fortunes, calling upon the name of the Lord.
But it's different. Verse 4 is what we call an imperative. It's a pleading with God when he's praying or singing a song.
He's pleading, Restore our fortunes, O Lord. To work like you worked in years gone past.
To bless us again like you blessed us. And that image is there described like streams in the Negev.
[23:12] Why does he write that? Why does he include the Negev? Where is the Negev? And what does that mean? Well, reading on the Negev, I understand that it's a dry ground.

It's confirmed by passages such as 1 Judges 1, verse 15. They were given that land, the Negev, and it's a dry land. And they complained about being given this land because they wanted another land with springs of water.
But whilst it's dry, it's a land that experiences sudden downpour that would absolutely transform the land. It would bring growth to the land.
So we have the psalmist here. So we have the psalmist here. Pleading with God. Praying with God. Restore our fortunes like streams in the Negev.
Form the streams in the dry ground once more. Bring new life. Bring new harvest. Bring growth.

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[24:24] Bring security for us as a people. Bring us hope. Take us from barrenness to fruitfulness. This is a spiritual revival.

The psalmist is pleading God for. It must come from you. It must come. God, you must send it. Flood us with your blessing once more. He prays and pleads to God. But you think, why is he asking?
Well, he's asking because he feels like he's in the dry ground, doesn't he? He's asking because he needs rain. He's asking because he needs God.
We need the spirit once more to bring life. There's no rain falling.
[25:37] But there's something falling. And it's the tears of the sore. Will the tears of the sore bring life?

As he looks out on the dryness of the ground, the condition of the land, the unspiritual people, it has him in tears.
As it should have us in tears. Are you concerned for the people of this community with your tears? Are you pleading with God once more to send his spirit? To bring life to the dryness of the ground? Maybe even the dryness of our own hearts. Send your spirit. Water my soul.
[26:44] Bring new growth. Because we know that if they do not know the Lord, if they do not know the presence of life, they're lost.

They're lost in an eternity in hell. If life does not come, the sore has a deep and weighty concern for his people.
Do you, this evening, do you have this concern of the sore? Yes, it applies to the minister.
But it applies to each and every one of us. Who have you been praying for as a Christian? We thought this morning of the paralyzed man carried by four men and we thought what a privilege it is for us to pray for each other.
Even if the four are required to pray to bring us to Jesus. Who are you asking to come to church with you?
[28:05] Who have you been sowing the gospel seed with? If you were to mark on your calendar who you have been praying for, how many days back do you have to go?

The Christian has the gospel. They have the seed of life. The King James Version will word it as a precious seed. And surely it is a precious seed.
It is promised not to return void. And you see there in verse 6, verse 5, sorry, those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy.
There's an assurance here given to the sower. There's an assurance here who goes out with the seed that they shall reap.
It's not night. Maybe. They shall reach. Shall reap. The one who has been given this precious seed sows in hard work.
[29:29] Is sowing in a barren land. sowing with all their effort. Sowing to see results. Sowing with many days of tears.

The climate of the day is against you. Maybe there's no shortage of people hanging over the fence laughing at you for your efforts.
Maybe you wonder why. Maybe you wonder how. In the midst of all these struggles will growth come?
Or where do you look? When you look forward and you see such a situation you see dry land you're giving it your all and sowing the seed where do you look?
You look back. You remember the Lord's faithfulness to his people. You remember Christ's faithfulness to save even you.
[30:45] That was once a dry ground. You recall the sowing of the gospel seed in your heart. and the life that that brought.

And you look forward. The situation unfavorable. But you know who God is. He's the same yesterday, today and forever.
And the God who once poured out his blessings on the people and in my own soul his precious seed will not return empty.
There will be a harvest. And so we confidently and faithfully sow the seed.
in patience and suffering and steadfastness like a farmer waiting for precious fruit as pictured in James 5.
[31:54] life. If you don't sow, there will be no harvest.

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But when we do sow, there shall be reaping with shouts of joy. so we look forward to what is promised in the Bible.
A day where the man of sorrows who wept over Jerusalem in the Gospels will come again for his harvest.
Jesus will come and reap and gather from this world, separating the wheat from the chaff. Will you form part of his joy?
Will you form part of this great harvest? is this your anthem?
[33:20] Is this your song? In every difficulty as we journey on, as we travel towards our great heavenly Jerusalem, we look back at the way in which God has worked in years gone by and it shapes how we should look forward today.

Knowing that there will be a harvest, knowing that the Lord will gather his people, taking them home to the heavenly eternal rest, to the worship of God, to the greater joy.
Surely there we will sing of his praise and his glory. The Lord has done great things for us. I pray these thoughts will be a blessing to us.
We'll conclude by singing in that psalm, Psalm 126, the Scottish Psalter version, Psalm 126, page 419 of the Blue Book.
We'll sing the whole psalm, and afterwards I'll pray. when Zion's bondage, God turned back, as men that dreamed were weak, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.
[35:07] The last verse, that man who bearing precious seed and going forth doth mourn, he doubtless bringing back his sheaves, rejoicing, shall return. So we stand to sing these verses to God's praise.

When Zion's bondage, God turned back. When Zion's bondage, God turned back, as men that dreamt were weak, then filled with laughter, there was an hour, our tongue with melody.
They mung the heathen, said the Lord, great things for them hath brought.
The Lord hath done great things for us, when's joy to us is brought, as streams of water, in the southern bondage Lord we call, whose snow and tears shall weep in time of joy and joy they shall that man who be in precious seed then going forth doth forth, he doubtless spring in back his sheaths rejoicing shall return
I'll close in prayer. Our Lord and our God bring rains upon the dry ground, pour out your spirit on those who are so hard against you, bring life we pray that we may rejoice once more at your work.
[37:52] Bless us as we part watch over us and keep us we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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