

MY MOUTH IS FILLED WITH LAUGHTER!

Today's Text: Ps. 126

Extracts:

When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter; and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad [Ps. 126: 1-3]

Godwin was a brilliant, handsome and only son of a widow. His father had died while he was still an infant and his mother promised to fulfill his father's dream for Godwin to become a medical doctor. By prayer and dint of hard work, Godwin's mother was able to pay his way through secondary school. Happily, he won the Nigerian Federal Government scholarship to study medicine in one of the top medical schools in the country. One day, word came to our village that there had been a bad accident and that everybody in the bus bringing Godwin home for Christmas vacation had died. The whole village quickly surrounded his mother to make sure that she did not kill herself. Her weeping touched the hearts of all of us the sympathizers who could not help mourning too. In those days, we had no telephone facilities to verify such stories quickly or to obtain more details. Two days later, to our pleasant surprise, Godwin showed up in the village to say that he was one of the three passengers who miraculously escaped unhurt! As sympathizers danced, while shedding tears of joy, Godwin's mother simply stood up, held on to her dear son, laughing uncontrollably!

*Usually, when people receive overwhelming good news, tears pour out of their eyes, as a first reaction. That is why a Nigerian proverb says that the day you find great joy may be the day your voice fails. In the story above, the sympathizers wept with joy when it became known that the widow's only son was still alive and unhurt. But why was Godwin's mother's mouth filled with laughter when she saw her son? Was it that she had already shed too much tears? Did laughing uncontrollably suggest that the good news had made her crazy? Why was her mouth filled with laughter? Have you ever found yourself laughing instead of crying for joy? What were the circumstances? How can you make it a permanent feature of your visage? These are some of the issues discussed in today's lesson and we shall use **Psalm 126** as a guide.*

1. Crying or laughing for joy?

Experts say that shedding tears is good for our emotional stability. By letting off steam, and not pretending to be strong while bleeding inside, we make it easier for ourselves to cope with external stimuli. In general, we shed tears when:

a) *We have bad news*

When we are sad or when we suffer some loss, tears easily flow. The people of the Caribbean wept when they saw on television pictures of the severe damage to Grenada and Jamaica by Hurricane *Ivan*. Americans and their sympathizers around the world wept when they saw on television the destruction of the World Trade Center twin towers in New York [September 2001]. Mothers all over the world wept when they saw being buried hundreds of Russian school children killed in the Chechen terrorist attack on their school [September 2004]. Therefore, shedding of tears comes naturally on sad occasions.

When Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, and friend of Jesus, died, the people came and “joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.” [Jn 11: 19]. They kept close watch on the young women. When Mary stood up to go and meet Jesus, “the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her... followed her, saying, “She is going to the tomb to weep there” [vv. 29-31]. When Jesus came in and saw everybody weeping, He also wept, in spite of the fact that He had determined to raise Lazarus from the dead [vv. 33-35]! So, tears can be infectious!

b) *We are too happy!*

People also cry when they are overwhelmed by good news. Olympic gold medallists, World Cup tournament winners, newly crowned Miss World or Miss Universe, Oscar winners, mothers of newborn babies, etc., all shed tears of joy. Maybe the tension had built up over time and the success point is the appropriate *moment* to release it. The keys to your new house or new car have just been handed over to you after a long process of paper work. The letter of appointment has finally come after a series of “punishing” interviews. Your marriage has been restored after a break of ten years. Your son/daughter has returned home after long years of rebellion, drugs and promiscuity. Tears flow naturally under such circumstances.

Joseph’s brothers had sold him into slavery in Egypt. Over time, by the grace of God, Joseph became the Governor of Egypt, next in rank to the Pharaoh himself. As famine and hunger ravaged the then known world, Joseph’s brothers came to Egypt to buy food. He recognized them but

they could not recognize him. During their second visit, when Joseph had got them to bring along Benjamin, his younger brother, the news became too much for Joseph. After revealing himself to them, “he fell on his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin *wept* on his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brothers and *wept* over them” [**Gen. 45: 1-2, 14-15**]. Those are tears of joy.

Some times, however, people may laugh (or least, not weep) when they receive sad news. For example, when Job lost all his daughters and sons and everything that he had, he did not cry. He simply fell to the ground and worshipped God [**Job 1: 20**]. When Ezekiel’s wife died, he did not shave nor mourn her because God had told him not to for a specific purpose [**Ezek. 24: 15-18**]. When David’s son by Bathsheba was sick, David fasted and prayed. As soon as he died, David cleaned up and ate [**2 Sam. 12: 20-21**]. All these people were men of faith who could see beyond the ordinary. They looked at their circumstances from a spiritual perspective.

Now, we come to the category of people who are filled with laughter when they receive good news. When the Lord told 99-year-old Abraham that in a year’s time his 89-year-old wife, Sarah, was going to have a son, she laughed [**Gen. 18: 11-15**]. When the child was born, he was given the name of Isaac [“laughter”] that the Lord had earlier given, and Sarah said, “God has made me *laugh*, and all who hear will *laugh with me*” [**Gen. 21: 6**]. After barren Hannah bore Samuel, the son that she had prayed for, she rejoiced before the Lord, saying, “My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. *I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation*” [**1 Sam. 2: 1**].

What is common to this category? We see stories of *miracles*, victories or successes that are against *all human or scientific explanations*. We see evidence of *tried and tested faith* where mere mortals or weak-kneed believers would long have given up. That is the import of **Psalm 126**.

2. Their mouth was filled with laughter!

If you have ever been privileged to pass through a wilderness experience, you will understand the point that I am going to make. God has made it clear to you *well in advance* the blessing(s) that He has for you at the end of the hazardous journey, *provided you stay on course*. At the beginning, when the earthly and material gadgets that you have relied on all these years are still available (but dwindling!), you may be able to remain optimistic and hopeful. Then, when you are now far away from base but not close yet to your destination, everything dries up. All you now have is *trust in God and His promise*.

That is when Satan comes in through the jeers of your detractors and the advice of well-meaning family members and friends. Did God actually speak to you or it is

a figment of your imagination? What has happened to your commonsense or logical mind? When did you become such a fanatic or a fool? Let us see now how God will rain *manna* from heaven for you alone in modern times! Job's wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" [**Job 2: 9**]. Even within your mind, the devil will begin to plant doubts. You pray and fast much more than ever before and nothing seems to happen. Even those reassuring dreams, visions and prophecies that kept you going earlier in the journey will disappear. You seem to be alone and on your own. You will cry all night and wake up still with uncertainties. Happily, you have held on to your faith in God and His promises, even when you still have nothing to show for it. Then, one day, quite unexpectedly, *it happens!*

The Psalmist and the people of Israel found themselves in a similar situation when they went into exile in Babylon. Through various prophets, God had assured them that after 70 years of hardship, they would be set free from their captivity and returned home to Israel [see, for example, **Dan. 9: 2**]. Let us make it vivid for our understanding. If the exile were to begin in the year 2004, it would end in the year 2074. By that time, those who are currently 20 years old will be 94 years old! What does that tell us? The majority of us who are alive today would be long dead by then. Those who are teenagers now and not yet married would be the old people then. Their children and grandchildren would not be able to appreciate "those fairytales" about God's promises to return them to their original home. A majority of them would have lost count and hope.

You can then imagine the people's joy when God fulfilled His long-standing promise and brought the remnants back to Israel. How did they feel? Here is how the Psalmist describes it:

a) *It was like a dream!*

The Psalmist says, "When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those in a dream" [**Ps. 126: 1**]. It looked so unreal! The people could not believe it that they were back in Jerusalem, to mount Zion, that they had heard and read about while they were in exile.

When you have waited for too long for a miracle, you may not believe for a while the reality when it finally comes. After Mary Magdalene and some other women had seen the risen Christ, they rushed back to tell the eleven apostles but "their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them" [**Lk 24: 10-11**]. Even after Jesus had shown Himself to them, Thomas who was absent at the time refused to believe, saying, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and my hand into His side, I will not believe" [**Jn 20: 24-25**]. The trauma of Christ's crucifixion and death on the cross had taken their toll on the disciples' faith threshold! Therefore, His resurrection, which they had been told would occur long before it

happened, looked like a dream. So it looks to us when God answers our fervent prayers.

b) *They rejoiced and worshipped God!*

The Psalmist says, “Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’ The Lord has done great things for us and we are glad” [Ps. 126: 2-3]. What they had thought was impossible had happened. They were overjoyed and they showed it by singing praises of their great God, to the extent that the heathen nations that had laughed at them all those years recognized that God had in deed visited His people.

When God finally delivers His promise to you, show your joy and appreciation. Then, all those who had scorned you during your waiting time will come to know that you were not crazy or foolish when you obeyed God. Your testimony may in fact win many of them to serve the Lord. After delivering them from the hands of Pharaoh’s troops who were drowned in the Red Sea, Moses and the children of Israel raised a song to the Lord that began, “I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously!... The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation” [Ex. 15: 1]. As three million people sang that song, it went far to reach the ears of the heathens around the Red Sea and in the Promised Land. They became scared because they then knew that the Lord had done wonderful things for Moses and his people [Jos. 2: 10-11].

c) *Their faith became renewed!*

The Psalmist then affirmed, “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall *doubtless* come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him” [Ps. 126: 5-6].

See how authoritatively he now speaks! Experience is the best teacher, as the saying goes. Now, he can show us with certainty the keys to having your mouth filled with laughter. First, sowing may be painful and tearful, but there is joy at the end. Second, even when you weep while you are sowing, make sure that you are sowing the good seed of faith, worship and cheerful giving. This is because, as a person sows, so shall s(he) reap [Gal. 6: 7]. *The rich harvest that will give you joy during reaping comes from the good sowing during weeping.*

3. Conclusion

Following the fall of our first parents in the Garden of Eden, we were held captive by sin. Even though God had promised the coming of Jesus Christ to Adam and

Eve [**Gen. 3: 15**], it took another 4,000 years for it to materialize. Through the ages, prophets kept reassuring people of God's promise. The majority of the people gave up hope. The few who believed sowed in tears as they were persecuted and derided. Then, out of the blues, through the womb of a virgin, the Christ was born! When He was presented in the temple in Jerusalem soon after His circumcision, there was a prophet, Simeon, whom the Holy Spirit had assured that he would not see death until he had seen the Christ of God. As soon as he set eyes on Jesus, he proclaimed, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; *for my eyes have seen your salvation*" [**Lk 2: 20-30**]. His mouth was filled with laughter!

Two thousand years ago, this Christ of God died for our sins on the Calvary cross. By shedding His blood, He has set us free from our captivity to sin. He has brought us back "to mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" [**Heb. 12: 22**]. The risen Christ is up there at His Father's right hand side as our Mediator [**v. 24**] and Advocate [**1 Jn 2: 1**]. We have been justified by faith, and now have peace with God through Him "through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, *and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*" Temptation will come. Trials and tribulations will come. We glory in them, "knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now, hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" [**Rom. 5: 1-5**].

Our mouths are filled with laughter and our tongues with singing, rejoicing always. In everything, we are now to give thanks "*for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus*" concerning us [**1 Thes. 5: 16, 18**]. Unbelievers now know that God has done great things for us. We are now like those who dream! That is why we are always glad! That is why my mouth is filled with laughter.

How about you?