

# "Sounds of Joy and Weeping"

*Listening to God's Word*

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Ezra 3:10-13

September 12, 2021

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You can read the background to today's Scripture [here](#).

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Two sorts of people were there that day.

They all shared the same memories. The city, the Temple, the celebrations, the sacrifices. Also the invasion, siege, terror, collapse, killings, destruction, deportation.

They'd all lived the same exile in Babylon. These Jews had settled down, raised families, formed communities, done business, prospered even.

Babylon was never home, though. They really belonged here. This land, Israel. This city, Jerusalem. This Temple, the House of the Lord. Here was their past, and their future. They all knew the prophets' promises. They would go back. Their scattered people, re-gathered. Their deposed royalty, restored. Their sacred city, repaired. The holy Temple, rebuilt. The God of their ancestors would return them, and would return to them. Always their faithful God, they would again be God's faithful people.

So when Babylon was itself conquered, and with the Persian king Cyrus now ruling, and now decreeing they could go back, they'd all rejoiced.

Now, they are here. Sharing in so much, they are yet divided into 2 sorts.

Those who remembered for themselves, who'd seen it all, heard it all, felt it all in their own bodies, who'd been children when the Calamity came. It had been fifty years ago. Still, they remembered.

And those who remembered it all only through their parents and grandparents. They'd come after, birthed and grown in exile.

Here they all are, standing at their new beginning. Those returning after so long. Those returning for the first time.

## II

When the builders laid the foundation of the Lord's temple, the priests clothed in their vests and carrying their trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, arose to praise the Lord according to the directions of Israel's King David. They praised and gave thanks to the Lord, singing responsively, "He is good, his graciousness for Israel lasts forever."

All of the people shouted with praise to the Lord because the foundation of the Lord's house had been laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and heads of families, who had seen the first house, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this house, although many others shouted loudly with joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, because the people rejoiced very loudly. The sound was heard at a great distance.

(Common English Bible)

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases  
 God's mercies never come to an end  
 They are new every morning  
 New every morning  
 Great is Thy faithfulness O Lord  
 Great is Thy faithfulness.<sup>1</sup>*

## III

Last Sunday I talked about an experiment we're doing. Instead of hearing a different Bible passage each week, we're slowing down and tending to the same passage over a few weeks. We're like water, percolating through the Scripture, being changed by it. Percolation takes time. It can't be rushed, not for the goodness to get in.

We'll practice a 3-week cycle, of **LISTENING**, **LEARNING**, and **RESPONDING**. Today, we **LISTEN**. We've already heard the passage once. We'll hear it a few more times. I'll offer some prompts along the way, with silence, time for reflecting and absorbing, tasting what God has for us.

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<sup>1</sup> Verse by Edith McNeill. © 1974, 1975 Celebration. For use solely with the SongSelect® Terms of Use. All rights reserved. CCLI License # 1460973.

IV

Listen now, this time more slowly.

As you hear . . . Notice what holds your attention.

When the builders laid the foundation of the Lord's temple, the priests clothed in their vests and carrying their trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, arose to praise the Lord according to the directions of Israel's King David.

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V

What held your attention? What spoke to you? Why do you suppose it did? What might God be saying to you?

What did you wonder about? What prompted a question? Questions are good. Maybe God is prompting yours?

What question might God be asking of you?

Did you notice the different reactions, the joy and the weeping? Most celebrated as they saw the beginnings of the new Temple. But those who remembered the old destroyed one, wept. Why?

Might both reactions be good?

When the joyful folks noticed the weeping ones, what might they have thought? And felt? What about the weeping folks? What might they have thought and felt at the joy of the others?

## VI

Listen again. This time, it's from a translation that brings out the strange accents and particulars of the original Hebrew text.<sup>2</sup> It will sound different. These differences can surprise us, and help us hear new things.

When the builders started Yahweh's palace, they put in place the priests in their vestments with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise Yahweh in accordance with the directions of David king of Yisra'el.

They sang responsively in praise and confession to Yahweh,  
*Because he is good,*  
*Because his commitment stands permanently for Yisra'el',*

And the entire people gave a big shout of praise of Yahweh, because Yahweh's house had been started.

When many of the priests and Levites and the ancestral heads, the old men who had seen the first house, at the start of this house before their eyes were crying with a loud voice, many were raising their voice in a sound of rejoicing.

The people couldn't recognize the sound of the shout of rejoicing from the sound of the people's crying, because the people were giving a big shout.

The sound was audible from afar.

(The First Testament)

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<sup>2</sup> John Goldingay, The First Testament: A New Translation (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 460.

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## VII

We are returning, slowly, to things we remember. Like, hopefully soon, we'll be worshipping again in our church building, our sanctuary. Imagine, if you can, what that will be like.

What do you see being the same as before all this began?

What do you imagine being different?

As you imagine, picturing yourself walking in, sitting down, looking around, what are you seeing? Feeling? Wondering?

As you see yourself doing things that used to be so familiar . . . and things that are new . . . and think of those things we still cannot do, what are you feeling? Wondering?

Imagine others around you. What might they be thinking, feeling, wondering around you? Weeping? Rejoicing? The same as you? Different?

What do you feel about that?

## VIII

We'll come back to this next week, for some **LEARNING**. I'll do a more typical sermon. I'll draw more out of the story, tell more of the background, and sift through some things we might want to notice. And, think more about the returning we're doing now.

The week after, it's your chance to **RESPOND**. What do you receive from this story? Can you share that? What is your returning like? To worship? To other things? Through all of this, what has God been doing in you?

You can respond in many ways: a song that connects, some art, your own story. Something you create: art, poetry, music, dance, whatever. However God's Word is percolating into you. When you have something to share, let me know so I can curate them for our worship, on September 26.

IX

Listen again, one more time. This translation brings the Hebrew text into words and phrases we might use today. The Bible was not written in high-and-mighty religious language. It's ordinary people-talk.<sup>3</sup> Again, it might help you hear new things.

When the builders laid the foundation of the Lord's temple, the priests clothed in their vests and carrying their trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, arose to praise the Lord according to the directions of Israel's King David.

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(The Message)

Weeping. Rejoicing. A muddle of smile and tears. Maybe feeling nothing. Afraid to feel anything. Whatever. God is good. God's graciousness lasts forever. Thanks be to God.

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<sup>3</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2002), 779.