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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
on 22 May 1910

SOWING AND REAPING

Text: Psalm 126 v 5

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy"

I like the heading of this Psalm - "The church celebrating her incredible return out of captivity". That is what all returns are to nature - incredible. Here the church celebrates either a return accomplished, or in faith, the return that was to come. Some think it was the latter, the great, the long captivity that was threatened and which also should finish by the return of the people to Israel. This was before the prophet - the Psalmist - who spoke in the Spirit of God. But that is of little importance to us compared with the truth that is before us. "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream". It had been so incredible, had appeared so naturally impossible, that when it was accomplished, they scarcely knew whether they were awake or whether they were dreaming. Who that has had particular restoration does not understand the feeling? This is so great, so unspeakably great, that it is scarcely credible, like a resurrection, a coming out of a grave of corruption. "Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing." As how can a person help laughing in his spirit, and singing with the tongue of his soul, when the Lord turns his captivity, gives him full pardon, free access once more to Himself, and familiarity and fellowship? "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad", that delivered us from our captors, from evil, bondage, corruption, sin, guilt. "The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad". And then, as if some captivity was yet felt, or as if what has gone before were a looking for the future, the Psalmist says "Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south" - a prayer that the saints, when in any bondage, find suitable to their souls. And then we have the text

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Do not look for the reaping before you have sown. People may think they know and love the Lord before they have known and hated themselves, but that is an erroneous thought. There is room for Jesus Christ in dead creatures, for His blood on guilty consciences, for His presence in desolate hearts, for His help in helpless cases. We will then, as the Lord may assist, look at

1. The sowing, and then at

2. The manner of the sowing - "They that sow in tears" and afterwards remark upon

3. The reaping, and the manner of that - "shall reap in joy"

1. Sowing is a serious business; sowing is a business with an eye to the future. It is for bread that a man sows; that is, it is for his life that he sows. And applying this to the labour of faith and prayer, how true it is that that labour is a real, a serious business! And too, there is an eye, in being engaged in it, to the future. A man wants bread, he labours for it. A sinner wants salvation, he labours for it. He wants pardon, Christ, mercy, help, hope, comfort, God's presence and he labours for them. This is his sowing. And, oh, it is a great thing, dear friends, to be brought by the Spirit to engage in this business, for there is in us an aversion to it naturally, but God brings His people to it by the Holy Ghost. I will try to show a little about it.

What do you sow when you sow to the Spirit? You sow many petitions, and as all real prayer has a point in it, an aim, that is to say something definite, so this sowing is a definite business. For instance - this some of you well know, when you sow to the Spirit under a sense of being guilty, what you sow is a prayer for pardon. "Pardon mine iniquity, O Lord, for it is great". You understand that. How often some of you drop before the Lord, or rather send up to Him, that petition. Just as one drops a seed into the ground in hope that it will grow and bear

fruit, so you have sent up a prayer to God "O Lord pardon mine iniquity, cleanse me from my sins; purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean, wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow". Nobody can ever be engaged in the world in a greater business than in that sowing to the Spirit, when he sows to the Spirit in supplicating God's mercy in the forgiveness of his sins. Oh, be at this - unpardoned sinners, who are concerned about pardon!

Sometimes there is this sowing. People are led by the Spirit to sow prayers for a distinct knowledge of union with the Lord Jesus. "O that I knew Him" Paul sowed like this continually under the leading of the Spirit. Dear friends, there is nothing to save us from our union with Adam and death but union with Jesus Christ, who is life. No imaginations, no fancies, no thoughts, no excitement, no religion of that sort will give you union with Jesus Christ. And when the Spirit cuts you off here by a conviction, and cuts you off there by a conviction, and shows you death is in your soul, death is in your affections, death is everywhere within you and about you, then He leads you to say "O let a lasting union join my soul to Christ, the living Vine!" that is a blessed sowing, to be sowing prayers, laying them up before God for that one blessing that holds in itself, as in an embrace, all other blessings that relate to salvation and the soul's welfare.

People sow to the Spirit when they cry "O take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth" or, as you have it in another Psalm "Be not silent to me, lest if Thou be silent to me I become like them that go down to the pit". Every prayer you pray is sowing, as you pray in the Holy Ghost; every petition you are enabled to lodge in heaven by that Holy Spirit's influence, is really sowing, and sowing is followed by reaping. When you are in trouble there is a sowing when the Spirit leads you more to pray that the trouble may be sanctified than that you may escape out of it anyhow; when He leads you to pray that God would make it a real blessing, a sobering, humbling, Christ-magnifying blessing to you; when He leads you to pray that you may be held on in the way of righteousness and of truth, that you may not be turned aside into vain jangling, that you may not be left to

wander, and to foully fall and backslide; when He leads you forth thus to pray about various things - particularly your own salvation - that is sowing.

Think of the greatness of this life, this business of sowing. Think of it in one or two points. First, this - that in sowing you deal with God - that there is a real dealing with Almighty God when you come before Him in prayer and supplication; that there is a drawing of your mind, spirit, thoughts, affections, desires, and aims off from man, and a coming into contact with the ever blessed God. That is a great experience, and being secret, man seeing it not, you need particular grace to bring you into it and keep you at it. I believe secret prayer, secret sowing, in a sense may be said to be unspeakably, immeasurably, more difficult than public prayer, where one may be led, and those who listen have the assistance of a voice as the speaker himself has. But, when you are away from men, when you have not the assistance of a voice, as it were, and there is nothing of an external kind to help you, Oh then the labour to deal with God, to speak to Him, laying your cares out before Him, spreading your feelings and wants and desires before Him, then you need the particular assistance and grace of the Holy Spirit.

It is a sowing for eternity, not time specially, nor first. It is a sowing for your soul's good, for bread for your soul. It is a sowing in righteousness, it is a breaking up of the fallow ground; it is not a sowing among thorns - we are exhorted not to do that. (Jeremiah 4:3) "Break up your fallow ground, sow not among thorns" A man sows among thorns who has got cares, the deceitfulness of riches, worldly ambitions, family and business cares, so surrounding and accompanying him, so filling his mind, that he is not sowing plainly and upon good ground.

Then again, sowing is a very distinct and simple thing; I mean simple in this sense - "Sow not thy field with divers seeds", one seed only. That is a simple thing. If you try to pull the world in, that is sowing with divers seeds, and that will pollute the ground. "Thou shalt not sow thy ground with divers seeds lest it be polluted." And when a man sows to the

flesh, and sows to the Spirit, as he thinks, and tries to put Spirit and flesh together; when excitement, fleshly religion, and carnal hopes, and that sort of thing, are respected, and the man mixes all up, he is sowing with divers seeds, his ground is polluted, and will bring forth nothing but gall and wormwood to him. The law would not have the Jews plough with an ox and an ass together, neither were they to wear garments made of wool and linen mixed. Everything under the old dispensation was to show the purity and simplicity of his religion. There is one religion, and that is not the world and God, but God Himself and a poor creature who is brought to deal with Him. And I do beg your attention to this - it may depress you, some of you, I wish it would properly so. It may make you think - we shall never be right if we follow what he teaches us, or tries to. Well may the Lord teach you. God will prove it one day to you; may it be in mercy! What I tell you is this "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" and if you are mixing (even if you have the life of God in your souls any of you) and are mixing natural religion, natural feelings, and sowing carnal hopes, and bringing in scriptures and hymns and various things to support yourselves, you will find God will blow upon a thousand of your things, if He leaves you one blessing. Ah you will find it a solemn thing to have sown to the flesh in this respect! But it is a serious thing to sow to the Spirit only, for you will have to leave flesh, schemes, notions, leave your prejudices against this and that truth, leave your spirit, renounce your own wisdom, and all your preconceptions of what is right and what is wrong will have to be left, and you be just a sinner, which is one of the hardest things that ever man learns and holds.

2. Now this brings me in the second place to speak of the manner of sowing. "They that sow in tears" One can think of a Jew trying to sow before the early rain came, the sun having baked the ground hard, almost like a brick burnt in the kiln. How he would sweat and labour. How difficult to break up the fallow ground, what sorrow he might feel, how he might speak to himself in a mournful dialogue in his own mind, as if he should say to himself "You will never have bread, you will never get a

harvest out of this ground." And so a poor child of God may sometimes feel his heart so hard, his spirit so unbroken, his understanding so foolish, his mind so dark, his thoughts so carnal, himself so confused, that he will be put to it sorely to kneel before the Lord his Maker, and pour him out a single prayer. Then he may say "Woe is me! Whoever can think that such a person is right? Who could imagine that ever a crop should grow out of such ground as this? Who can think - I cannot think myself - that ever God can bless such a sinner, that such a religion as this should ever bear fruit to the praise of God and the good of my own soul?" Now he has got a tear. One is dropped before God on account of his hardness, and that his fallow ground is not broken up.

Sometimes he sows with sorrow because of his unbelief, because it grows perhaps into almost infidelity. It may grow sometimes to such a height when he is on his knees that he may say "Is there a God to pray to?" It may grow to such a height that even while he is in the act of trying to pray, some dreadful thoughts about the Being of the Almighty may fill his mind with the utmost confusion and pain. And how this makes him weep before the Lord! His face (spiritually) is foul with weeping, and he says "What is to become of me?" And if one, a child of God, should go to him and say "Pray on, this will bear good fruit" that child of God might be to him as "one who sings a song to a heavy heart or takes away a garment in winter". But, I would say, O my friends, go on, go on! The devil is aiming to make you give it up, but as well as you can, go on. One may have to sow with the utmost irreligion in his mind. He may say, "I have not any religion". He may say "I thought I had, but it is gone and now what am I to do?" Sow in tears, and let the tears of sorrow, let the tears of confession, let the tears of sense of helplessness, let them fall, as God helps you, let them fall in secret before His blessed Majesty. Let the depression of your mind, let the confusion of your thoughts, let these go out before Him in humble confession.

You may sow in tears this way also - you have never yet had anything distinct from the Lord, and I do not mean by that you

have never had pardon. I mean this rather - you have perhaps never had a distinct word of help or encouragement from Him. You might say, perhaps, with "Mercy" - "Christiana got a letter calling her to go on pilgrimage: I only started out because I wanted to keep Christiana company." Nothing has been distinct in my case. Though I have lived under the shadow of religion and talked about it to some particular friends, though I have walked under the blessings of grace, I have never been called distinctly; what am I to do?. Well, poor sinner, go again to the Lord, go again to Him.

One may sow in tears of constant failures. You may say "I was warm the other morning, or last night, but the warmth did not last an hour, did not last many minutes. One may say "I thought I was drawn, but I was soon pulled away by some vanity or some care". He may say "I thought I felt a warm feeling to Christ, but I soon fell away from that feeling. I thought the scripture drew me, that salvation attracted me, but I soon found myself a wanderer in my thoughts, and vanity filled my mind." Well my friends, what then? You may say "I must give it up". Give what up? "Give my religion up". Well, if you have to do that, it wont hurt you; if what of it is false has to be forsaken; the sooner the better. You wont give this up though - at least I believe you will aim at holding it - you wont give the Throne of Grace up. "Lord do keep me praying, do make me a praying person, do listen to my poor broken prayers. Though I despise them, kindly receive them Thyself, through and in the merits of the Lord Jesus".

One may sow in tears in this way also. He may say to himself and before the Lord: "Lord, I do not know Jesus Christ. I have heard about Him, but I do not know Him, and I read that it is life eternal that Thy people might know Him and Thyself who didst send Him; and therefore because I do not know Him, I must be destitute of life". Well now, what does that do for you? O, it makes you say, "Lord, do put me right where I am wrong; do give me that that I am lacking; do bless me with Christ, with a knowledge of Him as my God and Saviour, and of His Person." In this way a sinner sows.

Again he may sow in tears when he may be under temptation and does not know it to be temptation. As, for instance, when he tries to pray and has such a sight and sense of his sins that he can hardly open his mouth, and then some sudden thought of despair springs up into his mind, and the voice of that is "It is no use hoping, it is no use for you to try and pray, God hates you." Ah, and only the Lord knows, such people drop tears. You may have let them fall on the pavement as you have walked, they may have wet your pillow at night. At any rate they have been in your spirits like a stream, and almost you can say with the Psalmist, "My tears have been my meat day and night while they continually say unto me 'Where is thy God?'" "I do not personally remember my own name more distinctly than I remember such thoughts filling my mind and such powerful upspringing of that feeling of despair, by the almost distinct word in my mind, "God hates you".

You sow in tears sometimes, not only when looking at and feeling such things as I have mentioned, but as you look at your whole life. Ah, and this is not confined to the beginning. No. I think it is even more felt after a long profession than at the start. What have I been? What has my life been? What have been my thoughts? And you may say to yourselves what often I have said to myself "Is it possible, in the nature of things, that a person who has lived as I have lived, can possess that holy principle of grace, can possess eternal life?" "They that sow in tears".

One word more here on this point. You may sow in tears because of your felt ignorance of all right things. How to pray, you do not know; how to order your speech aright, how to think of God, how to think of Jesus Christ, how to think of the Spirit, how to think of the Bible, how to think of mercy consistently with thinking of justice, how to think of omnipotence without despairing and thinking that will break you to pieces like a potter's vessel. You cannot imagine how to order your things and thoughts and speech aright before God, and that will make you weep. "Lord", you will say, "is there another on earth

so ignorant as I am, and is it possible for one so ignorant as I am ever to walk the way of life that is so full of difficulties, of snares, and of dangers?"

And as you go on sowing, here you drop a tear as one drops a seed, and there you drop a confession as one drops a seed into the ground. Ah, and you look at the ground sometimes and then you begin to drop tears afresh. Yes, a child of God may sometimes more look at the ground than at the seed, and looking at the ground may say "Nothing will ever grow out of this, it is like dust, it is like steel for hardness, it is death itself. " You do not know, and it is foolish of us to judge when we are feeling, and sincerely feeling, that we are too ignorant to form a judgment of anything.

Now you people who are sowing, and are sowing in the way I have mentioned, in tears, you have before you what you can little believe, that is, reaping. "They that sow in tears." It is sowing to the Spirit, walking in the light and praying in the grace of the Spirit. It is dealing with God, laying a bad case before a good God; it is praying for Christ's presence, for Christ's blood; it is praying that you may get good out of evil, that affliction may be sanctified to you, that hell may be taken out of your nature, and eventually that God may dwell in you, Jesus Christ be "in you the hope of glory". Well, I would be thankful that there are a goodly number of sowers here. Now, what is the Word of God? It is well on your side and on my side. O happy man on whose side one gospel word is! O if there is a promise of the blessed gospel that does not come like a sword against you (in your own judgment I am now speaking) how happy you are in your state, though in your feelings it may be, very miserable!

3. Look at this word: "They shall reap in joy". Now I will tell you your reaping will be just in your soul like Hannah's. Having Samuel, she said, "For this child I prayed". As the sowing is distinct, so is the reaping. But what makes this reaping? Ah you will say "I could not think the Lord would ever regard my prayers". What makes this? My beloved friends, you

get the early and the latter rain. You get the early rain that softens the furrows and fills them, that makes the seed germinate and grow. Now, you understand when the word comes in unction, when the gospel comes in unction, when some promise falls on your spirit, when some view of the Lord Jesus is given, that is like the early rain. Who can express the budding and growing of hope and desire? Who can say how a child of God's affections glow under the influence of the early rain? But that is not the reaping. No, between the early rain and the latter rain there is an interval. Sometimes the early rain ceases very early indeed in the season. It begins in November generally and ends in January or February. The latter rain comes months after. When does it come? Just a little before harvest the gentle latter rain descends. Now the latter rain is when there are special influences, special prayers, special exercise. As if a person says "Lord, I cannot go on like this. Here I am, desires grow at one time, and it is as if sheep are put in the fields to nibble and bite them off." That is what farmers do sometimes. Everything seems to die down or be eaten up. You say with the latter rain falling "Lord I feel so uneasy, so unhappy. I have not come to a point, I do not know yet my interest surely in the blood of Jesus Christ. Oh what will become of me if I die before I see the Lord's Christ?" Now see where the mind is. O I think it is so good and blessed when a sinner, though he has had many answers in providential things, says "Lord, I cannot live on these answers. I would be thankful for them, but I cannot live on them." But what do you want? O, says the sinner "I want Christ in my heart, I want to reap my sowing, the Bread of Life. I want to embrace Him by faith as Simeon embraced Him in his arms in the temple." The reaping, then is an answer to prayer, God's saying "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt". The father said, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief" in regard to the possibility of his son's healing. And he said it with tears. You may pour out a prayer with tears. Jesus comes, and you embrace Him. Jesus said to Mary, "Woman, why weepest thou?" Oh, she said "they have taken away my Lord" and very soon she had Him in a sweet, new manifestation of Him. She reaped that very quickly. Now that is the thing in religion. My beloved friends, that is the one thing in saving religion. There are many others

connected with it, things that accompany salvation, but this is the one thing that Jesus Christ has come, really come into your heart and soul. Babylon was a long way from Jerusalem. Hence the incredibleness of their coming back, but they did come back. But the distance between these two is not so great as you may feel is between Christ and your soul. You may say "There is sin between Christ and my soul, therefore hell between Christ and my soul". Ah, but Jesus descended, and when He had descended and made an end of sin, He ascended up again, and that blessed ascent tells the saints they shall ascend. And the first ascent they get to their solid comfort and joy, is when they have the Lord Jesus in their hearts. They shall reap this.

Now what is the joy of it? "They joy before Thee according to the joy of harvest". That is when a man has got all he has laboured for in that sowing. Now you take and connect this if you can. What did you labour for in prayer above everything? Say you laboured for a business, laboured for your health, for your family in prayer; laboured for recovery out of sickness, for an open way where none seemed possible, and say you get them all; this outward blessing and that recovery, you get them all. Bless God for them. But suppose they stop there. Now I say this - if you are rightly exercised you will be saying, "Lord, do not let me die short." What would it be not to be short? To be full. It would be to get the harvest of that sowing, that sowing in tears, those days when you laboured to know Christ, those hours on your bed when you said "Lord, I could from all things parted be if I had Thyself in possession." That time when you said under a hearing - "Lord, it seems near to me; O Lord do come". That time when you felt Christ all but inside, just at the threshold and you opened the door and He had gone, and yet you laboured on. "Do come, do come!" He, having come, you say - "This is the harvest, this is what I laboured for, the rest is very good, it was kind of God to hear me, it was very merciful of Him to do that for me and give me that blessing; but this I laboured for first, for this above the rest I prayed and now I have got it."

"They shall reap in joy". O it is joy! You know Zechariah speaks (9.15) of the saints being like bowls at the corners of

the altar filled with wine. Wine shows, as it is a figure, an inebriation of the soul, a fulness of joy. Paul speaks of this in the Romans when he speaks of being "filled with all joy and peace in believing; and abounding in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost". Jesus comes - "Woman, why weepest thou?" "I want my Lord." Here is the tearful sowing. "Mary!" "Rabboni!" Here is the joyful reaping. Sinner, why weepest thou? Why dost thou go aside at times and say "Lord, what is to become of my soul?" "Ah", you say, "I go because I have not Christ". And when Christ comes you say "Now I have got the labour of my life, I have got the harvest of my tears and of my prayers. God has caused me to reap." And I think such an experience is not dissimilar to that of Isaac's. We read that Isaac dwelt in Gerar, and Isaac sowed in that land and he reaped a hundredfold. (Genesis 26) You think of it! Ah, you may look at your prayers and say "they were poor prayers; at the best I did not reach so high as I would have done. I did not go to the length and breadth of God's mercy, I could not do. But Oh what a hundredfold reaping this is!" You enter into it when Christ has come and say "I did not reach all this" We do say, and properly sometimes, "the Lord has been better to us than our fears". I have said it scores of times. More than that I have sometimes said "He has been better to me than all my expectations, than all my hopes, and all my prayers." You did not reach this in your prayers - that the Spirit of God and of glory should rest upon you, did you? O, you thought, who could expect that here? But the God of glory is in your heart when Christ is there. Then you say, "This is reaping." Isaac sowed and reaped an hundredfold. O blessed reaping!

Well now, my friends, this is before every sower who sows in tears. This should encourage us to go on sowing. I hope it may encourage some of you here. I would not say a syllable to cast you down because you have not reaped, but rather would encourage you. Here is the reaping promised. "They shall reap". And they are to reap in this manner - they are to go forth and return with their sheaves: "He that goeth forth", (out of the world, out of himself) "and beareth the precious seed", (sows it, the precious seed of prayer, the precious seed of calling upon God) "shall

doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." There is a good deal that some of us will never reap. A good deal of sorrow of this world we shall never reap with joy, and a good many prayers we shall never reap answers to and from, such as carnal desires, asking amiss. We do not receive, asking for things that we may consume them on our lusts, we shall never get answers to such asking. But this, O captive soul, O mourning sinner, O weeping one at the Throne of Grace! this is to be followed, infallibly as God is true, as He has passed His promise, this is to be followed by a reaping - a reaping in joy too. Now joy is a wonderful grace. When you have "Jesus Christ in you the hope of glory", you will have this wonderful grace of joy. "Bless the Lord O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His Holy Name."

Well it is coming sinner, and I wish it may come today. O the Lord grant it may! Weak soul, do not trouble about being weak. The weaker you are, the more you can pray for the strength of God to be manifest, and the better you will realize His power being "perfect in weakness". O ignorant soul, do not despair because you are ignorant! There is no need. for Christ is wisdom. O failing creature, do not despair because you fail! The gospel is a gospel not for good, wise, strong creatures, but it is for sinners, for sinners, who feel the load of sin. And when it comes, O when it comes! - "Ah", you say, "that is the point, and I cannot wait." Well but the husbandman waits, and so you will if you are a husbandman. "He hath long patience and waiteth for the early and latter rain". And I tell you this, you have never sent one prayer in the Spirit that you will willingly give up. You will forget many things, but particular prayers you wont always forget, and you wont willingly give them up. "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord."

And he who reaps like this on earth, oh what will his reaping in heaven be? What will it be when God once and for ever wipes all tears from his face? May the Lord help us to go on hoping, sowing, praying, reaping, believing that He has said what He will surely perform, that we, thus sowing, "shall reap in joy"