

RESTORATION

Texts: Psalm 126
Isaiah 43:16-21

I. Introduction

A. Have you ever restored something?

1. Old car, piece of furniture?
2. My grandpa restored an old Oliver tractor when I was a kid, and I still remember the pride in his eyes when he'd give us grandkids a ride on it.
3. If you've ever embarked on a restoration project and seen it through to the end, you know the sense of accomplishment that can come from making something old back into something like new, to bring something back to its former glory.

B. If our two passages this morning are to be believed, it would seem that God is in the restoration business.

1. Isaiah 43 comes at a time when the people of Israel are in exile in Babylonia and looking for any hope at all that might simply help them get through their days of slavery and suffering.
 - a) And in the midst of their desolation and despair, God announces that he is embarking on a restoration project.
 - b) "I am about to do something new... See I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland."
 - c) Those are words of restoration, and that was a major restoration project. Can't you almost picture all the orange barrels along that brand new pathway through the thousand miles of wilderness between Babylonia and Israel?
2. And then fast forward a few decades, and God's restoration is complete, and the people have indeed come home, and you get Psalm 126, which begins with a joyful remembrance of what it was like when God had finished that original restoration project.
 - a) "When the Lord brought us back to Jerusalem, it was like a dream! How we laughed, how we sang for joy!"
 - b) The words of someone who knew what it was like to be restored.

II. So I've been pondering this whole notion of restoration, and what it looks like and what it means to know that God is in the restoration business, perhaps even for or even on us.

- A. One of the first things I thought of after the memory of my Grandpa and his tractor was the image of someone who restores paintings.
 - 1. And then I thought of one of my favorite authors of books that I read for fun, Daniel Silva.
 - a) He writes spy novels, and the hero in his books is an Israeli spy named Gabriel Allon
 - b) But he's also a world-famous restorer of great paintings.
 - c) And what I find just as fascinating and even exciting as all the spy stuff is when Daniel Silva describes, often in great detail, how Gabriel goes about restoring famous old paintings.
 - 2. So I thought it was kind of cool when we found this video entitled "Restoration" that is a parable of God as restorer. Watch the first part of the parable: (Show first part of video)
- B. That video got me thinking about some central truths about how it works when God makes us a part of his restoration business. And what I'm starting to realize is that it often begins with us.
 - 1. Because first of all, we need to understand that there are times in all of our lives when we are that old car, that forgotten piece of furniture in your grandma's attic, that faded painting.
 - a) Because until we realize that there are times in our lives when we all need the restoring work of God, it's going to be hard for God to do His work on us.
 - b) Last week we talked about until we recognize that we are sinners it's hard to confess our sins. It's so logical, yet so difficult sometimes.
 - c) And this is basically the same thing. Until we're aware of our blemishes and dents and where we are a little faded, any planned restoration work that God may have in mind for us is pretty much impossible.
 - 2. This realization that we are in need of some restoration work leads to the second step that we must be willing to take, which may be even harder, and that is that we need to submit ourselves to the restoration process.
 - a) Think back again to the video, where the restorer had to scrape away all the layers of dust and dirt and everything else to get back to the original layer.
 - b) Or if you've restored furniture, you know that often the first thing you have to do is scrape and sand away the old finish to get back down to the bare wood.

- c) So it is with us—often the first step in the restoration process is laying ourselves bare before God and other people.
 - d) To strip away (or to let God strip away) all that has built up in our lives over time that has made us less than what God wants us to be—less than what God made us to begin with, as we remember what it says in Genesis that God made each of us in His image, and it was good, and we were good.
 - e) This is where things like confession and repentance or simply prayer enter in to the process, which are acts of laying ourselves bare before God.
3. After all of that, after we carry out our end of the bargain, comes the restoration.
- a) I've been trying to look back at my own life about how that restoration has happened. And frequently it has been in rather quiet and unspectacular ways, and sometimes I only realize that I have been restored after the fact.
 - 1) Sometimes it's been when someone else has shown forgiveness to me when maybe I haven't deserved it.
 - 2) Sometimes it's been when I've failed in something that in retrospect was all about me to begin with.
 - 3) Sometimes it's been when I've finally sensed a call to go in a different direction with something or someone, and because of that, the job gets done or the relationship gets restored.
 - 4) And sometimes it's been at those times when I've simply realized that God forgives me. Because the reality is that so often, God's restoration work begins and ends with those great gifts of grace, mercy, hope, and forgiveness.
 - b) However it happens, I picture God like the painter in the video, with a quiet sense of satisfaction in a job well-done. Because like I said at the beginning, whenever someone who loves to restore things gets to see the project through to the end, there is great satisfaction.
- C. And then after all that, the question becomes “Is God ever finished with His restoration work on us and on the world?” Which leads us to the rest of the story from the video (show remainder of video)
- 1. Two great truths in that part of the video
 - a) First of all, we have this unfailing and inevitable ability to fall off the easel.

- 1) God does all of this amazing restoration work on us—helping us to strip away everything that has made us less than who we should be, brightening our lives with forgiveness and hope and all of those other signs of restoration, and what do we do? The winds of the world blow on us and we fall off the easel.
 - 2) And God has to start all over with us.
 - 3) Realize that this is nothing new. Do you think that those Israelites, after God had restored them and brought them back to their home country, that everything was perfect for them?
 - 4) To answer that question, read Psalm 126, where apparently they were experiencing a drought—not just a drying up of the riverbeds, but if we believe that the Psalms always have a deeper level, there is little doubt that the Psalmist was also talking about a spiritual drought that they were experiencing.
 - 5) Despite this massive restoration project that God had done just a few years before, now they needed to be restored yet again.
 - 6) And we shouldn't be surprised by that—it's been said that the entire Old Testament is a story of the continual cycle of God's restoring work.
 - 7) Going all the way back to Adam and Eve—the cycle goes like this—the people mess up, God restores them. The people mess up, God restores them. The people mess up, God restores them. Over and over and over again.
 - 8) Sound familiar? If we are honest it should. For the truth is, as fallible human beings, their story is our story. We all are experts at falling off the easel.
- b) Which leads to the second truth—that God never stops restoring us.
- 1) When we do allow the winds of the world to blow us off the easel, God lovingly picks us up and starts all over again.
 - 2) That is really what grace is—the unmerited favor, the unmerited ongoing restoration work that God does in our lives, over and over and over.
 - 3) And the truth is that God gets just as much joy out of doing it all over again as he did the first time.

III. Conclusion

- A. So in the end, what does Psalm 126 and the story of Isaiah's people tell us when we have fallen off the easel yet again? What do we gain from their story, when the grime and grit and dirt have built up in our lives, and we have become a very dim version of who God made us and wants us to be?
1. What I noticed this week is that both passages begin in the past tense.
 - a) Both begin by recounted great acts of restoration in the past.
 - b) In Isaiah, God reminds them of one of his other great restoration projects of the past—the leading of the those whining and grumbling people through the Red Sea.
 - c) And the Psalmist says “Remember when God restored us to our homeland, and the joy and laughter we experienced back then.”
 2. Which points again to the truth of the second half of video that as God has restored us before, God will do it again.
 - a) Sometimes the very first thing we can do that will empower us confess and repent and lay ourselves bare before the great Restorer yet again is simply to remember how He has restored us before.
 - b) To recognize the great theological truth that if God could do it before, God can do it again.
- B. So today we give thanks to our great Restorer God.
1. A God who is the restoration business for the long haul.
 2. A God who sent his son into the world to do his restoration work on us at a personal level.
 3. A God who sent his son to die for us as the ultimate and eternal act of restoration.

