

## Revive Us Again

Psalm 85:1-13

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to take them, open them, and turn with me to Psalm 85 as we continue to work our way through the Third Book of the Psalms. You may remember...way back, we started working through the Psalms in the First Book in Psalm 1, and then we studied the Book of Genesis, and then we came back after studying Genesis and looked at the Second Book of the Psalms. And then we studied Exodus and Leviticus, and now we're in the Third Book of the Psalms, and after we finish this then we'll look at Numbers, and then we'll look at the Fourth Book of the Psalms, and then we'll come back and we'll look at Deuteronomy (should the Lord tarry), and that way work through this great book.

And all along we've said the Psalms are not simply a record of Old Testament spirituality, they are a guidebook for the Christian life. The Psalms give us a beautiful recounting of Christian experience. When the early church would sing and read Psalms in its worship services they would often sing what we now call *The Gloria Patri* at the end of the reading or the singing of those Psalms, and you remember how *The Gloria Patri* goes:

Glory be to the Father,  
And to the Son,  
And to the Holy Ghost;  
As it was in the beginning, [What does *it* refer to? The Trinity]  
Is now,  
And ever shall be,  
World without end. Amen.

Why did they do that? In order to publicly proclaim...remember, especially in the early days of the church there would have been many Jews gathered there, and Christians of Jewish extraction. They were saying the God of the Psalms is the Triune God revealed definitively in Jesus Christ, and so the Psalms give us a guide to Christian experience.

Now, this Psalm actually gives us a perfect example of that because the context of this Psalm...and we're not told the specific context — commentators debate

about the specific context... but the general context that is obvious is that this Psalm is being sung by the people of God in the Old Testament after the return from exile. God has brought them out of their exile and back into the land, but in some circumstance He has visited again His wrath upon the people of God, His indignation upon them. And now having been restored from the exile, the people of God are crying out for relief, for restoration, for revival, for refreshment from God who has restored them from their exile but now in the midst of their sin is again bringing punishment on them. And commentators debate about when exactly the events surrounding (the circumstances surrounding) this Psalm occurred. It really doesn't matter for us. We just need to know that God has definitively rescued this people, and that's celebrated in the first three verses; but now again, because of their sin, punishment is being visited upon them; and they resort to God and then resolve to hang on.

But even as this Psalm looks back to God's bringing the children of Israel out of that exile, so also the Christian looking at this Psalm looks back to the definitive work of God in Jesus Christ wherein He redeemed us from our sins, and in every circumstance of life we go back to that point where God has definitively acted in Jesus Christ. And so, even as the Old Testament saints looked back later to the Exodus or to the restoration out of the exile and say 'See how God has definitively redeemed us and forgiven us?' so also the Christian in every circumstance of judgment and of wrath looks back to the work of Christ in which God has redeemed us. And that is the beginning point for our assessment of our present condition and experience.

So let's read God's word together in Psalm 85. Before we do, let's look to Him in prayer and ask for His help and blessing.

*Lord God, thank You for Your word. This is Your word for Your people. It is practical. It is profitable, and it is true. Grant that we would receive it as such by Your Spirit, understanding, believing, and acting on it. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Hear the word of God.

For the choir director. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.

O Lord, Thou didst show favor to Thy land;  
Thou didst restore the captivity of Jacob.  
Thou didst forgive the iniquity of Thy people;  
Thou didst cover all their sin. [Selah.  
Thou didst withdraw all Thy fury;  
Thou didst turn away from Thy burning anger.

Restore us, O God of our salvation,  
And cause Thine indignation toward us to cease.

Wilt Thou be angry with us forever?  
Wilt Thou prolong Thine anger to all generations?  
Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again,  
That Thy people may rejoice in Thee?  
Show us Thy lovingkindness, O Lord,  
And grant us Thy salvation.

I will hear what God the Lord will say;  
For He will speak peace to his people, to His godly ones;  
But let them not turn back to folly.  
Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him,  
That glory may dwell in our land.  
Lovingkindness and truth have met together;  
Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.  
Truth springs from the earth;  
And righteousness looks down from heaven.  
Indeed, the Lord will give what is good;  
And our land will yield its produce.  
Righteousness will go before Him,  
And will make His footsteps into a way.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts.

What does a Christian do in the midst of the years when he (when she) feels the judgment of God visit? What do we do in the circumstances of our life when we've known the forgiveness of God, we've known the blessing of God, and then we've come into a valley and we're confused in that valley, because it seems as if the favor of God has departed and that punishment of God has replaced that favor? How do we respond? How to react?

This Psalm is telling us what to do. This Psalm describes the condition of the children of Israel having been restored from their captivity, a captivity which they experienced because of their disobedience, now finding themselves once again under the wrath of God because of their disobedience, and it marks through three stages of their response.

First, I want you to notice in verses 1-3, they remember; secondly, in verses 4-7, they resort; and then, finally, in verses 8-13, they resolve. In verses 1-3, they remember God's forgiveness; in verses 4-7, they resort to God, and in verses 8-13, they resolve to wait for the Lord's blessing. Let's work through each of these parts together.

## **I. Remembering the greatness of God's saving forgiveness**

First of all, in verses 1-3, notice how the psalmist states that he is remembering the greatness of God's saving favor and forgiveness to them in bringing them out of the exile: "O Lord, You showed favor to Your land; You restored the captivity of Jacob."

Notice the tense of those words there. They're past tense. He's looking back and he is remembering what the Lord had definitively done in bringing them out of captivity, out of Babylon back to the land, and he is actively, deliberately, remembering the favor that God has shown upon him.

Now, remembering is a very important thing, and I want to say that *remembering* here is not just like 'Oh, I remember that phone call that I need to make.' No, this is remembering of a higher order. Today is my fourteenth wedding anniversary, and in the eyes of at least one person, it was very important that I remember that! And last night at nine o'clock, she thought I had forgotten! The flowers were hidden here at the office, and when she woke up this morning, they were there waiting for her. I had not forgotten! But it was very important.

But there are other ways we remember, too. If you've ever been talking to a friend — maybe you've been talking to a friend about a traumatic event that occurred in their life, and as you're talking to them, their eyes drift down and you can literally see them remembering that event: the death of a child, the loss of a friend, a trauma of life. And that...it's almost like for just a tiny instant they're reliving that moment. It's anchoring them in that moment.

Sometimes we think of remembering in a sentimental way. Some of you remember the Paul Anka song that got used for the old Kodak pictures commercial — "the times of your life" — *Good Morning, Yesterday*. You wake up and time has slipped away, and it's a very poignant little sentimental song about how time just slips past you, and suddenly those really small things that you didn't appreciate when they were happening are really very significant to you now, and you don't feel like you adequately appreciated them when they were happening. Remembering is a very important thing, and that's the kind of remembering that's happening here. This isn't just 'Oh, yes, I remembered to make that phone call.' This is remembrance that anchors the believer in the reality of what God has definitively done, and in this case there is a remembrance of how God restored the children of Israel from exile.

And look at the words that are used: 'You favored, You restored, You forgave, You covered, You withdrew, You turned away. You restored your favor on us, O Lord; You forgave us our sins. We were in the exile because of our sins, and You forgave us. You covered that sin. That sin that was ugly in Your sight, You covered it, You atoned for it. You withdrew Your anger; and You didn't just withdraw Your anger, You turned Your anger away from us.' And you see the gladness in the heart of this Old Testament believer as he remembers what God has done, because sin is serious, and that exile was deserved; and yet, God in

His mercy has taken that sin away, has forgiven them, has restored them to the land. And you see, the believer, the new covenant believer, the New Testament believer, the Christian, looks back in the same way to the finished work of Jesus Christ and rejoices that God has done this — glories in God's having done this! Never gets tired of thinking about how God has done this! Starts every point of life from the reality of what God has done in Jesus Christ, and it means that we live in a deep, real gratitude for an undeserved rescue.

And I want to say that this means at least two things for us.

First of all, it means that we are always going to take our sin and God's salvation of us seriously. I was watching an interview. It was done on national television with a leading evangelical figure in the United States, and a secular reporter was in his church visiting him. And this secular reporter, who I think goes to a mainstream church — an Episcopal church or a Presbyterian church of a more liberal extraction — makes the comment to this evangelical leader, “I noticed that you never talked about sin while I was visiting with you.” And my heart just sunk as this evangelical pastor responded, “Oh, we do occasionally talk about sin, but you understand Jesus took care of that on the cross, so sin's not much of a big problem any more. The real thing is we want people to be able to live their dream.” And I just died a thousand deaths at what was being represented as an evangelical witness.

Now I don't say that tonight so that we can beat up on somebody else and feel real good about our theological correctness. That's not my point. My point is this: It's always a dangerous place when we don't take sin and God's salvation of us from sin seriously. In fact, I wonder how many people are completely missing the gospel (with very good intentions) in that congregation and many others, because they haven't adequately taken sin seriously.

Derek was quoting to us that great hymn *Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted* just this past Sunday night:

“Ye who think of sin but lightly,” [and what does it say?] It says,

“Mark the sacrifice appointed;  
See Who bears the awful load.  
T'is the Word, the Lord's anointed,  
Son of Man and Son of God.”

And so he says if you think of sin lightly, look at Who had to die for sin to be forgiven. And you see, the believer looks back upon the work of Jesus Christ and he takes his sin seriously because he sees the Son of God, the Son of His love, on the cross, and he's saying ‘He had to die for my sins to be forgiven? How great my sins must be! And He died to save me from my sins? How great must the Father's love be! How great must the Son's love be!’ You see, the believer

never tires, never stops rejoicing in the greatness of that redemption from sin.

I was on the airplane with Derek yesterday afternoon coming back from a meeting, and I was reading in William Plummer's *Commentary on the Psalms*. And Plummer just has a remarkable way of pulling devotional thoughts out of the Psalms, and he's commenting on this Psalm and he says this...he starts asking these questions, questions that have occupied the content of sermons that he's listened to all his life. He says:

“How can God be just and yet justify the ungodly? How can He condemn sin and yet let the sinner go free? How can He declare and manifest His awful righteousness and yet be righteous in bestowing life on the guilty? How can He magnify the law and make it honorable, while yet its penalty is not borne by transgressors, but by their voluntary substitute? These are but a few of the hard problems which find solution in the cross of Christ.”

And then listen to what he says:

“For near a half century I have been hearing and reading good discourses from time to time on this theme, yet it is as fresh and delightful as ever. Oh, that I may see it better before I die, and infinitely better after I die!”

Do you see his delight in remembering the redemption that God has given to him in Jesus Christ? He never gets tired of hearing the gospel. It's the starting point of everything. And you see, this Psalm is pointing us to that, even as it points to this definitive Old Testament event in which God shows His forgiveness by bringing the children of Israel out of captivity. It is especially seen at the cross of Christ, which is the cause of God bringing all of His children out of captivity. And the believer looks back to that and rejoices as he remembers our redemption from sin.

And so the psalmist says take sin seriously, and rejoice in redemption. It starts with remembering this redemption, this great saving forgiveness of God.

## **II. Resorting to God as the only hope of salvation And then, secondly, notice in verses 4-7 how the psalmist resorts to God.**

Where does he go? He's in a pickle. He's part of the people who have been brought out of the exile, but now he feels the punishment of God because of the unfaithfulness of God's people. God's wrath is being visited. What does he do? He resorts to God as the only hope of salvation. He takes refuge in God's character and actions. Did you notice how we sang about that tonight? You know, “Why was I a guest?” we sang. Why was I a guest at the great marriage supper of the Lamb?

“T’was that same love that spread the feast  
That sweetly drew me in.  
Else I would have refused to taste,  
And perished in my sin.”

So it's pointing to the reality of God's saving work, God's saving love.

Then the psalmist here is saying that's where we go to when I'm in need of forgiveness and redemption: I run to God, I resort to God. And we sang about it. Did you notice those words in the second song we sang, No. 370?

“O Lord, disturb this sleep of death...  
O Lord, create soul thirst for Thee...  
O Lord, exalt Thy precious name...  
O Lord, give Pentecostal showers.”

The emphasis is on what God is going to do to remedy my circumstances, and in this passage we see that emphasis. Notice verse 4: “Restore us...” then verse 6: “Revive us...” then verse 7: “Show us Your lovingkindness.” In other words, the psalmist is pointing us to God and God alone, because of His character and His promises, His deeds. Take refuge in God in this time of indignation and punishment. Run to God for your refuge. Resort to God as the only hope of salvation. Look to God alone because of who He is. He tells us that ‘I do not take pleasure in the death of the wicked, but I delight when sinners turn from their wicked ways to Me.’

One of the commentators on this passage reminds us that those words from Ezekiel (and we find them echoed in Isaiah elsewhere) make it clear that what God delights in is this glorious creative work where He brings blessing out of cursing, where He showers forgiveness where it's not deserved, where He brings restoration where there's been fracture. That's what God delights in. That's the center of His heart.

And then it goes on to say God's condemning judgment, that's the strange and alien work that He does. You see, we often have it the other way around. We have this picture of God who just can't wait to zap somebody. And the psalmist is saying, ‘Lord, I know who You are. You can't wait to forgive a sinner. That's what You delight in. That's what you're like.’

And God has made promises. You see how the language itself goes back to Abraham, doesn't it? “Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?” It goes back to Abraham, back to Moses. Remember how God is spoken of in the days of Abraham and Moses?

“You are the Lord, the Lord filled with lovingkindness, patient, slow to anger, plenteous in mercy. You will not visit Your wrath and indignation forever, but You

will shower Your grace and favor on our children and our children's children, to a thousand generations.”

That's God. That's who He is. That's the promise He's made, and the psalmist resorts to this God as the only hope of salvation. Notice that the psalmist doesn't resort to his own goodness. He doesn't resort to his own promise, 'I'll do better.' He doesn't resort to some technique...if you only do this...if you take your faith up to a higher notch. No, everything's on God. He resorts to God. God's my hope, not taking my faith to the next level; not trying really hard; not resolving to do better; but I'm running to God, and He's my only hope. And so he remembers the greatness of God's forgiveness, and he resorts to God as the only hope of salvation. He looks to God alone.

### **III. And then he resolves to wait for the Lord's benediction.**

Don't you love what he says in verses 8-13? “I will hear what God the Lord will say; For He will speak peace to His people.” You know, bumper sticker theology almost always gets it wrong, but one bumper sticker that I've seen that absolutely gets it right is this one (you remember what it looks like?) — it says “No Jesus? No peace.” In other words, if you don't know Jesus, you can't have the peace of God. No Jesus, no peace. And then right under it, what does it say? “Know Jesus? Know Peace.” In other words, if you know Jesus, you know the peace of God. And that bumper sticker gets it exactly...in fact, it could be a commentary on this passage! And he's saying 'I'm standing to wait because I have as a sinner cast myself on the mercy of God, and I know that He will speak His benediction on His people.' Because when you know Jesus, you know peace.

And so this psalmist says 'Lord, I'm going to rest in this hope of Your blessing and Your fullness and Your goodness, and I'm just going to hang on until it comes. I'm just going to wait for the blessing to come, because I know that when I have been humbled and I see the sin of my heart, and I throw myself on You as my only hope —not presuming! You know, you've heard 'Well, God will forgive; that's His job'— No, no! That's not the attitude of this psalmist. In fact, the attitude of this psalmist (and you see it in the first three verses) is 'This is absolutely unbelievable! You mean God forgave us?'

You remember when Daniel starts praying about the children of Israel coming out of captivity, what's his response? 'Lord, You sent us into captivity because we were sinning. Guess what we're doing in captivity? Sinning! And even though Jeremiah said we'd be restored in 70 years, I look at our hearts and it doesn't look like we've changed; so, Lord, forgive us our sins! We don't deserve to be brought out of captivity!' It's the same attitude of...notice, it's another “Janitor's Song”...it's the sons of Korah at it again! These guys are used to dirt — the dirt of their own hearts — and they're not flippant about sin. It's the most surprising thing in the world that God has forgiven them. They're not presuming on God.

But once they have resorted to God, they're just waiting. They know that forgiveness, that peace, that blessing is going to come.

You know, Samuel Rutherford, the great Scottish minister and theologian, went through times where he felt the wrath and indignation of God so much that it almost undid him. And he said of that one time, "I hang by a thread, but it is of Christ's spinning." In other words, that thread that I'm hanging by was spun by Christ. And that's all he needs. And this psalmist says 'Lord, we're under Your condemnation. We're under Your just condemnation, but I've resorted to You and now I'm just going to wait until Your blessing comes, because that's the kind of God you are: a God that delights to forgive people that don't deserve it.'

Oh, my friends, this Psalm teaches us how to live the Christian life. Let's pray.

*Lord God, teach us from Your word how to live a cross-centered life, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Would you stand for God's blessing.

*Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, both now and forevermore. Amen.*

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