

April 24, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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REVIVE US AGAIN Psalm 85

Leviticus 26 contains a very important expression of God's character. Human nature being predictably inconsistent since its fall into sin with Adam acts and reacts as though God is also inconsistent regarding His promises. Hear what God established as a law of sowing and reaping in the early years of Israel's history:

"If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, (4) then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. (5) Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. (6) I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. (7) You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. (8) Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. (9) I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you. (10) You shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. (11) I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. (12) And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. (13) I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. (14) But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, (15) if you spurn my statutes, and if

your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, (16) then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. (17) I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. (18) And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins, (19) and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. (20) And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit" (Leviticus 26:3-20).

This law of God is simple enough to understand. God kept His promise. When the people of Israel lived in obedience to God, He blessed them and gave them peace. When they rejected God's law and disobeyed Him, He chastened them with various manner of circumstances. On the surface, the law or principle is easy enough to understand.

The question is: "Does this law reveal the character of God in every age, or was it a temporary thing God did only in His relationship with ancient Israel?" More directly I ask, "Do we modern Christians experience God's blessing in our lives when we are enjoying fellowship with Him by being obedient to Him?" Do we modern Christians experience the Lord's displeasure, made evident through chastening, when we are not living in obedient fellowship?

This is a very important portion of Scripture because it reveals how God related to His chosen people in the Old Testament days. At the same time, it reveals how God relates to us who are part of His chosen people today. We who are part of the Church, the Body of Christ, should be quick to realize when God has withdrawn His hand of blessing and be quick to cry out to Him to restore our love and respect for Him.

A Desire For Revival (vv.1-7).

Along with the psalmist, it is good for us to remember past revivals (vv.1-3). It is true that in times past God has been favorable. *LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob (v.1)*. That God has been favorable to His people is evident. God had heard His people cry for help from Egypt. With a mighty hand God delivered them from their slavery. God gave the Promised Land to Israel as He removed the sinners from the land. But as the period of the judges reveals, there was an inconsistent walk with God at best. The repeated cycle in that period was that the people rejected God, God sent the enemy to harass them, the people repented of their sins and cried for mercy, and God restored the fortunes of Jacob.

If the sons of Korah wrote this song during the reign of King Hezekiah (as some suppose was the case), Israel and Judah had gone through several similar cycles of disobedience, chastening, repentance, and restoration. During the time of Hezekiah's reign, the people of Judah would have been deeply saddened by the reality that God had judged their relatives to the north by allowing Assyria to defeat them and had scattered the people about 5 or 10 years earlier.

Some Bible students place the writing of this psalm in Nehemiah's day after God had restored Judah (but if that were the case, the name Jacob would not be used).

But what about modern day application? Is it justifiable to apply the same principle to our circumstances? Yes. We, too, have experienced God's favor and restoration. He granted us incredible favor when He delivered us from the bondage of sin through the sacrifice of Christ. God accepts us in the Beloved One and looks on us—who are by nature His enemies—with favor. We know what it is like to experience God's favor, then sin, and experience God's restoration.

Therefore, we confidently concur with the sons of Korah when they conclude that God has forgiven sin. *You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin (v.2)*. Many are the examples of how God forgave Israel's iniquity. Iniquity is no small matter as the word refers to depravity or perversity. That is how God viewed the activity of His people when they chased after the sensuality of the Moabites at Peor, when they worshiped the pagan gods who demanded child sacrifice.

Though their sin was ugly and perverse, God covered the people's sins when they confessed them and repented. He put the offenses out of His sight. With what did He cover their sins? He covered their sins the same way He covers our sins, with the blood that Christ would shed on

the cross. Because God has covered our sins also, we can identify with the ancient Israelites on this matter. We know what that is like. When we confess our perversity of seeking other gods, primarily our own will, God forgives us. When we say the same thing about our sins that God says about them, He covers them over. Our sins, though multiplied and onerous, God puts out of His sight by covering them over with the blood of Christ.

That is the kind of truth we ought to contemplate. The often seen but often misunderstood word *Selah* simply means, "Think about that." It is good for us to slow down, take some time out of the busyness, and think about how God choose to cover our sins from His holy sight. Those thoughts are especially profitable if we have any concept of God's anger at sin.

Stop to think about the grace of God in that He stayed His wrath. *You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger (v.3)*. One time I was part of a Bible study where the topic of God's anger at sin came up. A young man at the study genuinely struggled with the idea of God being angry. He said that since anger is always sinful and never allowed by God among His people, that such a reaction on God's part would be impossible. He proposed that the Bible writers simply used a word that humans could identify, but that the word when applied to God doesn't mean what it means to us.

God does experience wrath and hot anger. Wrath is a movement or reaction toward that which displeases God. Hot anger is a fierceness that is evident when the angry person's nostrils flare. God responds to sin with this kind of reaction. He does not sin when He expresses fierceness against the thoughts and actions that oppose or attack His holy character. We are always in danger of sinning when we become angry because our anger is self-centered. The wonderful news in this verse is that God was over being full of wrath against His people.

From this we learn an important principle. If we do not understand God's wrath and fierceness against sin, we will not understand the need for God's grace. The better our understanding of God's anger against sin, the huger God's grace for us stands in contrast to His anger.

Knowing that God forgives and restores, we are wise like the sons of Korah to beg for new revival (vv.4-7). They begged, "Restore us again." *Restore us again, O God of our salvation (v.4a)*. Based on our experience in life, we know that in the past God has been favorable and restored fortunes (v.1), forgiven iniquity and covered sin (v.2), and

withdrawn His wrath and turned from His anger (v.3). The nation of Israel certainly had learned this truth from generation to generation. We have heard the stories and read about God's amazing grace and mercy as He has forgiven sins throughout whole people groups. We know from experience how God forgave our perversions and covered our sins.

Do we cry out to God for the same expressions of grace and mercy today? People who are not aware of sin do not ask God for restoration. People who don't care about sin do not ask God for restoration. Where there is no conviction, no discomfort, no concern that fellowship with God is broken, there will be no request for restoration. That is not our condition! If you love God, you must be aware of the perverse nature of your culture. Do we not all have a strong foreboding that God's wrath has been boiling in heaven and that He is about to pour out that fierceness on our nation?

Last week I stood for several minutes and took in a beautiful view of Mt. St. Helens. The dormant volcano looks so peaceful and so serene. But many of you remember thirty-six years ago when she blew her top in the most devastating volcanic eruption in the history of the United States. Also, last week we spent a few days at the coast in Seaside, Oregon. Very noticeable are all the warning signs and the great emphasis on knowing the escape routes in case of a tsunami. We, who live in Greenville, SC, seldom think about tsunamis. But, as far as history and geological evidence shows, at one point in ancient history, a massive tsunami hit the northwest coast wiping out whole societies of people and reshaping the land.

Is there not a feeling in our souls that such disaster and worse could be God's justifiable response to America's perversion? And what about our own personal offenses against the Holy God? People who are cognizant of God being offended at sin are quick to ask for restoration. We cry out to the God who promises salvation to all who trust in Him. We beg Him to restore us to a right relationship with Himself as we plead the blood of Jesus Christ as the covering for our sins. At the very least, we can beg God as did the prophet Habakkuk who had to preach God's pending judgment against His people: "*O LORD, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O LORD, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy*" (Habakkuk 3:2).

Also the sons of Korah asked God to stop being angry toward us . . . and put away your indignation toward us! (v.4b) *Will you be angry*

with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations (v.5)? The child of God cannot endure the thought that God would be angry with him. If you can be comfortable welcoming, playing with, fellowshiping with sin, iniquity, and perversion in your life, you need to check on your relationship with God. God's true children are very sensitive to His chastening. When God begins to make His displeasure known in our lives, we will be driven to ask questions like this. And if God chooses to send prolonged judgment to our nation, we will need to come back to these questions and requests frequently.

Furthermore, when we become aware of sin and desire restoration, we will desire for God to show His love that we might rejoice. God-sent revival causes rejoicing. *Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you (v.6)?* In days past, God revived His people. Israel experienced that. Great Britain and parts of Europe experienced that. America has experienced that. Will God not do this again?

The word translated *revive* means to quicken, to give life. The idea is well illustrated by an AED defibrillator. Hopefully you have not needed the assistance of this contraption; but if you ever do, it will be much appreciated. In simple terminology the defibrillator shocks a person's heart back into proper rhythm when life-threatening arrhythmia occurs. Only God can shock us into a right relationship when sin breaks the pattern. Like the person who has been shocked into right rhythm, so we rejoice greatly to be in fellowship with God again.

We plead for the salvation that is rooted in God's love. *Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation (v.7)*. God willingly, gladly answers our request for restored fellowship because of His steadfast love. *Steadfast love (chesed)* is one of the great concepts of the Bible. It is God's unwavering love that flows from His faithfulness to His own covenants and promises. Of the 241 times it is found in the OT, the word is used 127 times in the Psalms. The psalms are songs of rejoicing because of God's steadfast love and prayers pleading for God to act according to His steadfast love. Because God operates through steadfast love, when we beg Him to restore us to right fellowship, He is happy to do it. Are you struggling with sin? Beg God to save you from it and He will because of His faithfulness to His covenants.

Evidence of Revival (vv.8-13).

Revived people hear and fear God (vv.8-9). We do not turn away, but we listen to God. *Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly (v.8)*. Restored people hear what God says. They hear through His Word. They hear as God the Holy Spirit directs and teaches through the Bible. No one has to beg or cajole revived people to read their Bibles. We love to spend time in the Word every day because that is where we hear God speak.

When we hear God speaking through His Word, what is His message? We hear God speak peace. But what about all those examples of God's judgment against sin? What about the fear of God pouring out judgment against sin even in our day? Sinners ought to fear. They ought to be afraid—very afraid.

But we who are revived rest securely in the arms of our loving Father. One time when our children were young, one of the boys and I were walking along a street when a big, ugly dog came around one of the houses barking. I picked up my son, told him not to be afraid, and then proceeded to yell at the dog in an attempt to frighten him. Like that, the same loving heavenly Father who pours out His fierce wrath against unrepentant sinners holds the revived people in the folds of His promises where we find peace.

To fear Him is to be saved. *Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land (v.9)*. It is good to be terribly terrified of God. It is good to know that He is able to carry out any threat He makes. It is good for us to know that He is angry at our sins. It is good for us to be so terrified that we bow in humble submission to God. At that point, we can experience “good” fear, mature fear. It is good for us to have awesome respect for our loving Father. God receives glory when we love Him so deeply that we fear to grieve Him.

Revived people are also thankful for God's love and faithfulness (vv.10-13). If God has revived us to a right relationship with Himself, we understand the meeting of love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace. The psalm says, *Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky (vv.10-11)*.

Here are four important traits of God that are evident to us when He has revived us. First is steadfast love. Revived people understand God's unchanging covenantal love. We have such great confidence that

God will act according to His promises that we rest peacefully in Him. Second is faithfulness. Faithfulness is God being true to His Word and character. To that end, God is truth. We judge all things according to what God has established or taught. Steadfast love and faithfulness are complementary traits of God. Third is peace. Peace is the result of God's faithfulness to His Word. He alone is the author of true peace and, therefore, true peace flows from His character. That is why it has to kiss righteousness, which leads us to the fourth trait, righteousness. This is the standard demonstrated and established by God's character. Righteousness is not only what God says it is, but what God is. Steadfast love, faithfulness, peace, and righteousness are the chief characteristics of God's kingdom. Why would someone not desire to live like that?

Furthermore, we whom God has revived understand that God gives what is good (vv.12-13). *Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase (v.12)*. God knows what is good, determines what is good, and gives it to those who He revives. A sinning world has no right to expect to receive such pleasures from the hand of Him who they infuriate. So what is good? Righteousness is good. *Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way (v.13)*. Often human nature interprets good to mean, pleasant, satisfying, happy, or exciting. Those emotions are short lived. God who is good, knows what is best and gives that to us who He has revived. Sometimes that path seems a bit rugged or difficult or even frightening. But in the end, we find true peace and joy walking in fellowship with our God.

Our world and our culture are at odds with God. God is holding frightening judgment over the people. How foolish they are to continue to fight with God, yea, to increase their fight against Him. It is best for us to yield to God, confess our sins, be restored to spiritual life by Him. In that condition, we find peace and enjoy walking with Him in fellowship.