

Restore Us

Psalm 80

To the choirmaster: according to Lilies. A Testimony. Of Asaph, a Psalm.

- ¹ Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
 you who lead Joseph like a flock.
 You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.
- ² Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,
 stir up your might
 and come to save us!
- ³ Restore us, O God;
 let your face shine, that we may be saved!
- ⁴ O LORD God of hosts,
 how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
- ⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears
 and given them tears to drink in full measure.
- ⁶ You make us an object of contention for our neighbors,
 and our enemies laugh among themselves.
- ⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts;
 let your face shine, that we may be saved!
- ⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt;
 you drove out the nations and planted it.
- ⁹ You cleared the ground for it;
 it took deep root and filled the land.
- ¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade,
 the mighty cedars with its branches.
- ¹¹ It sent out its branches to the sea
 and its shoots to the River.
- ¹² Why then have you broken down its walls,
 so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
- ¹³ The boar from the forest ravages it,
 and all that move in the field feed on it.
- ¹⁴ Turn again, O God of hosts!
 Look down from heaven, and see;
 have regard for this vine,
¹⁵ the stock that your right hand planted,
 and for the son whom you made strong for yourself.
- ¹⁶ They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down;
 may they perish at the rebuke of your face!
- ¹⁷ But let your hand be on the man of your right hand,
 the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!
- ¹⁸ Then we shall not turn back from you;
 give us life, and we will call upon your name!
- ¹⁹ Restore us, O LORD God of hosts!
 Let your face shine, that we may be saved!

Restoration

I have a guilty pleasure to confess: I like shows where they restore old, run-down homes, specifically *Fixer Upper* with Chip and Joanna Gaines and *Home Town* with that really big bearded guy, Ben, and his tiny wife, Erin. I like seeing an old, beat-up, run-down house restored to beauty and new life. The older and more run-down my body feels, the more I seem to relate to these shows.

This past week was a hard week. The sudden and shocking death of Jean Paul hit me pretty hard, and along with rising COVID deaths, and continued political ugliness spreading rampantly in our country, I was feeling pretty low. So, we come this morning to Psalm 80, which is remarkable among the Psalms for its repeated plea, in a refrain found in verses 3, 7, and 19, with variation each time, pleading with God to “restore us.”

- *Restore us, O God! – v. 3*
- *Restore us, O God of Hosts! v. 7*
- *Restore us, O LORD God of Hosts! – v. 19*

Each time the plea is repeated, the name of God is expanded. For me, I can almost hear the desperation in Asaph’s voice: Restore us, restore us, restore us.

But what is Asaph asking God to do? Did Israel need a home makeover? Was he hoping for some white shiplap or to tear up some old nasty carpet and have pristine hardwood floors revealed? No, of course not.

The root of this word “restore” is to turn back, and it can be used in the sense of turning again back to a broken relationship or of repentance. The problem in Israel wasn’t run-down interior décor, and it wouldn’t be fixed with a fresh coat of paint and some new landscaping. Their hearts had turned away from God, and they had run after idols for generations, and now they were reaping what they had sown. They needed to be turned back to God, their covenant Lord, the One who had redeemed them and called them His own, and Asaph knew only God could change their hearts.

I. **Give Ear and Shine Forth, O Shepherd of Israel, vv. 1-3**

Asaph opens his prayer with a direct plea, apparently focused on problems in the Northern Tribes of Israel:

- ¹ *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth.*
- ² *Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh,
stir up your might
and come to save us!*
- ³ *Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!*

First of all, to establish the context: It seems from these opening lines that Asaph is concerned for the Northern

Tribes of Israel, which is significant for us to grasp, too. He refers to God as “*you who lead Joseph like a flock*” and then refers to the two tribes of Joseph, named for the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were the largest and most important tribes of the Northern kingdom of Israel. He also names Benjamin, which remained in the Southern kingdom of Judah, but Benjamin was the only full brother of Joseph, both were the sons of Jacob and Rachel.

Why would Asaph be focused on Northern Israel, especially since the office of the Asaphite leader of worship was a position in the Southern kingdom of Judah? Well, this was likely written at a time when Israel was being invaded and conquered by the Assyrians, in the 700’s. In fact, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament made in the 300s BC, puts a title on Psalm 80 which says it is “concerning the Assyrians,” so it’s probably written as a plea for God to rise up and restore Israel and protect her from the Assyrian invaders. This is important because it shows us that Asaph values the true spiritual unity of God’s covenant people, even though they are politically divided. Northern Israel split off from Southern Judah hundreds of years prior to the time of Psalm 80, and Israel had had nothing but wicked, corrupt kings, while Judah had remained under the line of David and had several good kings, along with many bad ones. Overall, Northern Israel had been much more idolatrous than Southern Judah, embracing Baal worship and Asherah worship much earlier and much more widely than Judah did.

All of this would give Asaph ample reason to simply write off Israel and harden his heart toward them, but he doesn’t. He has a heart for all of God’s people, and he pleads to God. He calls on God as the “*Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock.*” This is the only time this title “*Shepherd of Israel*” is directly used as a title for God in the Psalms, although David famously refers to God as “my shepherd” in Psalm 23. Psalm 28:8-9 has the beautiful prayer –

*The LORD is the strength of his people;
he is the saving refuge of his anointed.
Oh, save your people and bless your heritage!
Be their shepherd and carry them forever.*

And that’s the only other psalm that directly refers to God as the shepherd of His people. However, this shepherding theme has been building in the Asaph collection of Psalms. Whoever arranged the Psalms in the order we have them now – and my best guess is Ezra right after the return from exile – there’s a very clear intentionality in places with the grouping and developing of themes. So, this past week, during our morning devotions in the Psalms, we saw that Psalms 65, 66, and 67 progressively develop the missions theme of God’s glory and kingdom among all the nations of the earth. So also here, in Psalms 77-80, the Asaph psalms develop the idea of the shepherding of Israel, which reaches its climax here in Psalm 80:

Psalm 77 ends with this verse:

*“You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” – v. 20*

Psalm 78 ends with these verses:

*He chose David his servant
and took him from the sheepfolds;
from following the nursing ewes he brought him
to shepherd Jacob his people,
Israel his inheritance.
With upright heart he shepherded them
and guided them with his skillful hand. – vv. 70-72*

Psalm 79 ends with this verse:

*But we your people, the sheep of your pasture,
will give thanks to you forever;
from generation to generation we will recount your praise. – v. 13*

And then the very next verse in the Psalms is Psalm 80:1 –

*Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.*

When we think of God as the shepherd of His people, we can think of two functions of a faithful shepherd which Asaph needs God to do for His people, Israel. A good shepherd **protects** his sheep, and a good shepherd **corrects** his sheep. And Israel needs both protection from the Assyrian invaders and correction, for their hearts to be turned back to God.

So often, we cry out to God for protection, but we resist His correction. Truthfully, so often these two go together, don't they? We need protection because we've gone astray, and so we also need correction.

Not only does Asaph call out to God as the Shepherd of Israel who leads Joseph like a flock, but he also calls on Him as "You who are enthroned upon the cherubim." What does this mean? Well, sadly, we have a picture in our minds of cherubs as cute little naked babies with wings. But in the Bible, the Cherubim are the majestic winged living creatures who surround the throne of God. They are powerful and they surround God's throne crying out "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty." However, Asaph here probably has in mind the cherubim in the Temple, on the Ark of the Covenant, in the Holy of Holies.

In the middle of the Temple, God's earthly throne room, or dwelling place, was the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary, behind a thick curtain. Inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant, which was the footstool of God on earth, where the majesty of God met with His people. Inside the Ark of the Covenant was the Law of God, carved by the hand of God on two tablets of stone on Mount Sinai. Overshadowing the Ark of the Covenant were the outstretched wings of two cherubim. Where their wings met over the top of the Ark of the Covenant was called the mercy seat. It was here, on the mercy seat, that the High Priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice once a year on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

So, when Asaph refers to God as the One who is enthroned upon the cherubim, it is likely the Mercy Seat of God that He has in mind. He is calling on God to shepherd His people in mercy, according to His mercy and the atonement for the sins of His people. He asks God to “*shine forth*” and to “*stir up your might and come to save us!*” Notice again how he, though he is in the Southern kingdom of Judah, still identifies with the Northern Israel, in asking God “*to save us.*”

And then, we get the first of the three-times-repeated refrain:

*Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!*

II. O LORD God of Hosts, How Long? Vv. 4-7

Then, we come to verse 4 and we hear the familiar plea of the lament in the Psalms – “*How Long?*”

*⁴ O LORD God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
⁶ You make us an object of contention for our neighbors,
and our enemies laugh among themselves.
⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!*

Interestingly, Asaph uses the full title of God, “*LORD God of Hosts,*” which he will come back to in verse 19 for the final repetition of the plea refrain.

Here the “*how long*” is not directly focused on how long the Assyrians will ravage the land, but rather Asaph asks “*how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?*” Now *THAT* is dealing honestly with God. The people of Israel are calling out for help and deliverance, but God is angry with their prayers. *Why?* Asaph doesn't ask why, probably because he knows why: God's people are idolatrous. They're crying out to the Lord, but they're also crying out to Baal and Asherah and other local Canaanite idols, and even when they cry out to the Lord, they're doing it through the Golden Calves Jeroboam had set up in Dan and Bethel. So, God is angry with their prayers because they're seeking other gods and they're not seeking the Lord rightly.

Imagine if your spouse was angry with you and not listening to you, and you kept pleading with them to listen to you and be nice to you, but you were openly carrying on an adulterous relationship and were also being rude and mean in the way you're communicating to your spouse. How do you think that's going to go? Well, that's what Israel was doing – asking God for favor and deliverance from the Assyrians while carrying on with open idolatry and wrong worship of God.

What is it that might hinder our prayers to God? Have you been pleading with God for something and you're not seeing any progress? James 4 says this –

You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and

do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?” ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore, it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. – James 4:2-7, ESV

Covetousness and worldliness – a friendship with the world – are spiritual adultery. It’s the same thing as what Israel was doing. It’s essentially cheating on God with other gods and other loves and then asking God to be faithful to us when we have no desire to be faithful to Him, really. How do we think that’s going to turn out?

The sad and sobering fact that we need to face at this point is this: Northern Israel never did turn back to God and repent of their idolatry, and God did not spare them. They were conquered by the Assyrians and dragged off into captivity, never to be heard from again.

We need to examine our lives and ask where the world or where material possessions have hold of our hearts.

Then, Asaph repeats again his plea refrain, this time adding “of hosts” to God’s name, a reminder that God is not only mighty but He is the commander of the armies of heaven:

*Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!*

III. The Vine You Brought Out of Egypt, vv. 8-16

Knowing how much Israel deserves God’s judgment, Asaph shifts his appeal starting in verse 8 and reminds God of the loving investment and commitment He has made to Israel –

*⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.
⁹ You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.
¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches.
¹¹ It sent out its branches to the sea
and its shoots to the River.
¹² Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
¹³ The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.
¹⁴ Turn again, O God of hosts!
Look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
¹⁵ the stock that your right hand planted,
and for the son whom you made strong for yourself.*

*¹⁶ They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your face!*

Asaph pleads with God to care for His beloved vine, the House of Israel. The imagery of Israel as the Lord's vineyard is a fairly common one in the Old Testament, but as vineyards go, Israel was not a fruitful one –

*For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice,
but behold, bloodshed;
for righteousness,
but behold, an outcry! – Isaiah 5:7*

Justice and righteousness are the fruit God wanted from Israel, and He looks for the same fruit from His people today. Instead, God's people worshiped idols and oppressed the poor.

Even when Israel was prosperous, her prosperity did not lead her to be faithful to God –

*Israel is a luxuriant vine
that yields its fruit.
The more his fruit increased,
the more altars he built;
as his country improved,
he improved his pillars.
Their heart is false;
now they must bear their guilt.
The LORD will break down their altars
and destroy their pillars. – Hosea 10:1-2, ESV*

What do we do with the prosperity God gives us? Does it deepen our thanksgiving and our dependence on Him? Israel's prosperity led her into greater idolatry. Does ours?

Thankfully, while Israel failed as the vineyard of God, God planted another vine, this one a True Vine of Justice and Righteousness:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. – John 15:1-6, ESV

Jesus is the true vine, the One who came to be all that Israel failed to be, to bear the fruit of righteousness and justice for the glory of God the Father. If we believe in Jesus, we are grafted into the True Vine as branches that bear the fruit that flows from the vine. Notice that all fruit-bearing life and power comes from the Vine and not from the branches. It is only by abiding in Jesus and having His words abide in us that we bear much fruit for the glory of the Father.

If the vine metaphor begins to point us to Jesus, then verses 17-19 bring Jesus into clear focus as the hope of His people.

IV. The Son of Man at Your Right Hand, vv. 17-18

*17 But let your hand be on the man of your right hand,
the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!
18 Then we shall not turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call upon your name!*

Asaph had referred to Israel as the son in verse 15, but now he sharpens his focus on one man “*the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself.*” Some people think Asaph must have meant Israel or the king, but this language is Messianic in nature and most clearly points ahead to the coming King, the long-awaited and promised Son of David, the son of man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus was baptized, God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, empowering Him for His trials and His messianic ministry. Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father in heaven, and it is through Jesus alone that we are saved.

Asaph knows how wayward the hearts of God’s people are, but he also trusts that when the Messiah comes and God empowers Him to save His people, then and only then, God’s people will be kept. Then, they will no longer turn back from God. Only when God gives us true, eternal, spiritual life will we truly and faithfully call upon His name.

And then we get the third and final and most complete repetition of the refrain-plea:

*19 Restore us, O LORD God of hosts!
Let your face shine, that we may be saved!*

That we may be saved –

Psalm 80 ends as the refrain ends each of the three times – “*that we may be saved.*” What does it mean to be saved? What does it take to be saved?

If you had asked the Israelites in Asaph’s day what they wanted when they asked God to save them, they probably would have said they wanted rescue from the Assyrian invaders. Ans this would have been something

worth celebrating. When we looked at Psalm 76, we saw that God’s miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian army was the likely background, and that deliverance is celebrated in 2 Kings and Isaiah. But that great miracle would not be enough to truly save God’s people.

Today, if you asked most Christians what it means to be saved, I wonder what they would say? Does it mean that we get to go to heaven when we die, that we don’t go to hell? While that is certainly a miraculous deliverance, that is not enough to be true salvation for us.

Asaph’s refrain asks three times for God to “*Let your face shine, that we may be saved!*” This language “*Let Your face shine*” comes from the Aaronic priestly blessing, found in Numbers 6, which was central to the worship of God’s people for so many generations:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²³ “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

²⁴ The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

²⁷ “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

– Numbers 6:22-27, ESV

This is what Asaph is asking for – “*Let Your face shine*” upon us and be gracious to us. To put it in the simplest terms, to be saved is to have God smile on you. To be saved is to have the loving fellowship and blessing of God, in this life and for eternity.

And how is it possible for the face of God who is holy, holy, holy to shine on wayward, weak, worldly, idolatrous sinners? Only through the son of man, the man at God’s right hand, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood covers our sins and whose life brings us peace with God forever.

I love how 2 Corinthians 4:6 puts it: “*For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*” That is salvation, and that is true life, and that is God’s ultimate and eternal answer to Asaph’s plea. Praise His holy and gracious name!