

Psalm 81:1-16 Thankful for God's Word Falls Ch. PM 11/26/2023

Pastor Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments to complete. He was writing too many chapters of books and too many articles. He had too few of days remaining before his looming deadlines. Pastor Swindoll got nervous and tense about his work. Here is the story of how God got his attention. He says, "I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day," he recalled in a book he wrote. "Before long, things around our home started reflecting the pattern of my hurry-up style. It was becoming unbearable.

"I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.'

"Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me -- and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.'" "I'll never forget her answer: 'Then listen slowly.'"

In worship services we need to slow down the pace of our lives and listen slowly to what God is saying to us. In worship, we meet with our Heavenly Father, who is above time, and outside of the business of our lives. We sing, and we give, and we pray. The most important thing we do in worship is listen to God through His Word being read and proclaimed. We listen for God's voice. The Spirit of God speaking through the Word of God. We need to listen slowly, because it takes time to get across to us the message that changes our hearts!

This Psalm calls us to worship God, and be thankful for His Word.

OT approach to Psalm 81 sounds like this - the people of God, brought out of danger by the action of God at the Red Sea, become the people under the Word of God, which they were called to hear and obey.

NT approach to Psalm 81 sounds like this....the people of Christ, brought out of danger by the rescuing action of Christ at the cross, become the people under the Word of Christ, which we are called to hear and obey.

This Psalm refers to a feast, either Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles. Each of the two feasts was a remembrance of the Exodus, when God brought His people up out of slavery in Egypt. That Exodus was a picture of God's rescue of us. The Exodus was just as prominently the main event in the Old Testament as the cross is prominently the main event in the New Testament. So, this Psalm is calling us to worship, based on our need to be rescued, and the fact that we have been rescued by God through Christ's death at the cross, and resurrection.

**The centerpiece of our worship is when we listen to God in His Word.**

What is our response? Rejoice, remember, repent.

**1. Rejoice. (v.1-5)**

The people would rejoice with this song, much like we rejoice at the abundance of harvest at Thanksgiving time in the Fall.

The title of the Psalm has the word “Gittith” which comes from the word “Gath” and means wine-press. It coincided with a grape harvest, and served as a thanksgiving for the provision of grapes, so that they could make wine. They did not always have a good water supply, so they made weak wine to store for the months ahead, in order to have enough to drink.

In verse 1, the congregation was called to sing aloud to God, and to shout for joy. It was a time to rejoice.

In verse 2, the musicians were asked to raise a song and to play the instruments – the Levites were the ones trained with instruments, so verse 2 was inviting the Levites to play. The feast was celebrated with great excitement. Singing, shouting for joy, playing instruments.

In verse 3, the priests were asked to blow the trumpets on the feast day. They were marking out the days of the celebration based on the new moon and the full moon. Those special trumpets that the priests had, were not made with metal, but rather were ram’s horns. The ram’s horns were sounded when Jericho fell, with trumpets and shouting. God asked them to look back to gaining entrance into the land, to look on the plenty they were to enjoy in the land, and to celebrate on the feast day. They would play those special trumpets on special days such as feast days. The sounding of ram’s horns was an expression of joy in what God had done in the distant past, in the recent past, and expectation of what God could do in the coming month of celebration. On days of worship, the celebration horns would bring people to a time of rejoicing before God.

Verses 4 and 5 showed the people being directed by what God had to say – the source was His own law, the law of God. God had a purpose for His people, and God was making that purpose known through statues, rules, decrees. God was communicating with His people through use of language through prophets, and even at times when God spoke from heaven. God was expecting them to listen to His Word, and to rejoice in living in His good lifestyle and holy pathway.

## **2. Remember. (v.6-10)**

In verse 6, God remembered specifics of the time that Israel was a slave in Egypt. It was not merely the abstract memory of a general oppression and overall redemption. God had vivid memories and God called the people to specific memories: remember the shoulders relieved of burdens, and remember the hands freed from baskets! God had freed specific shoulders from actual burdens and God had freed certain hands from actual baskets – God had released them from tasks of slavery in Egypt. In verse 7, God had said when His people called to Him in distress, that God delivered His people from distress. Here is what they need to

remember – even though the people had not listened to God, GOD LISTENED TO HIS PEOPLE! God called them to remember the details of God’s rescue.

That can carry forward to our remembering the damage and slavery of our sins and remembering the cross that set us free. We remember our sadness and our lowest moments. We remember the nails that set us free. We remember the pain of our wrongdoing, and we remember the crown of thorns that it took to release us. We read back over the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, of the manner in which God redeemed us.

Now back to Psalm 81, verse 8, God asked His people to hear Him. “*Hear, O My people, while I admonish you, O Israel, if you would but listen to Me!*”

What did God want to say? In verse 9, we basically get a repeat of the first commandment which is, “*You shall have no other gods before Me.*” Here in verse 9, God phrased it this way, “*There shall be no strange god among you; you shall not bow down to a foreign god.*” Why? In order to explain why, God here in verse 10, repeated what He had previously written in the preface to the Ten Commandments, “*I am The LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt...*” [Here God added something gracious about what it means that God brought His people out of slavery.] Listen to the end of verse 10, “*Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.*” Consider the abundance of God’s provision in this statement!

Whatever God gives us, is always for our good. Listen to Deuteronomy 6:24, “*The LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear The LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as we are to this day...*”

But we are never able to obey! We are to remember the provision of God was not given based on our obedience, for we were never able to obey sufficiently. Rather, the provision of God is based on the gift of His Son Jesus, and the perfect obedience of Jesus on our behalf.

We are to remember that our worship is about listening to God in His Word, and believing His gracious provision is a gift.

This is about why we gather in worship. Jesus said it this way, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*” (Matthew 22:37-39) This is the summary of the whole law of God.

### **3. Repent. (v.11-16)**

In verse 11, we read a lament from God, “*But My people did not listen to My voice; Israel would not submit to Me.*”

The significant thing about verse 11 to notice is the phrase “*MY PEOPLE.*” The issue here is not that the pagan people of the world would not turn and start listening to God. No. These words “*MY PEOPLE*” appeared in verse 8, and are repeated here in verse 11, and repeated a third time in verse 13. There is a baffled tenderness to God’s words here. That the recipients of so great a rescue would not

stop to listen to their Savior is a remarkably grievous situation. God said it - MY PEOPLE WOULD NOT LISTEN!

Why? Because God's people had wanted to follow their own way.

Verse 12, as a result, God gave them over to following their own counsels! In Romans 1, Paul used 3 times the phrase "*gave them over*" to refer to unbelievers being given over to their idols. But here in our Psalm, the surprising event is that it was God's people who were the ones being given over. Thankfully, God would not leave His people there. God did not leave His people in Egypt, and God will not leave His people in idolatry, even though the people had reached a point of not listening to God!

In verses 13, God expressed His grieving again, and God was shown to be more ready to rescue His people, than His people were to repent.

This is echoed when God sent His Son Jesus into the world, and Jesus preached. Did the people listen to Jesus? Not as we would expect and hope. Consider the grief of Jesus in Matthew 23:37, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*"

Back here in Psalm 81:13, there was still time to repent. "*Oh, that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways.*" And remember verse 8b, "*O Israel, if you would but listen to me!*"

In verse 14, God would subdue any enemy. There will come a time for God to act as Judge of the nations.

In verse 15, God would respond to those who hate him, and give them a fate that would last forever. God can and will judge His enemies.

In verse 16, God would treat His people with love and mercy. With sin removed, God is able to bless by feeding His people with the finest of wheat, and satisfying His people with honey from the rock.

The crisis of Psalm 81 is provoked by the people not listening to God. Because they did not listen, God took away their king, their temple, their city, and their nation. But God has not utterly abandoned His people. He is a covenant-keeping God of faithfulness! God will still bless them. But it is clear that they will not listen. So, God must provide a king and a substitute who will do for the people what they cannot do for themselves. We need an obedient King, who will also save God's people from their own disobedience, and from their own failure to listen to God in His Word.

God must be the strength of His people when we are weak. Jesus came in order to obey where we could not obey, and fulfill God's law for us with perfect obedience.

Remember how Jesus was tempted 3 times? There are hints of those 3 temptations here in Psalm 81. First, Jesus after fasting 40 days was tempted to turn stones into bread. Here God promised in Psalm 81, verse 16 to give people bread they need – the finest of wheat. Second, Jesus was tempted to throw Himself down off the pinnacle of the temple, but refused to put the Lord His God to the test. God promised to preserve and protect His people who do not put him to the test, and here in Psalm 81, verse 7, God said he tested His people at the waters of Meribah. And third, Jesus was tempted to have all the kingdoms of the world if he would worship the devil. God promised abundant blessings to those who worship Him alone, as we see in Psalm 81, verses 9-10, that they are not to have another God.

Jesus is the king who always listened to God and always did the will of God. Hebrews 10:5-7 says that Jesus came to do God's will. At the transfiguration, when Jesus became bright, it was then that God the Father declared, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased* (Matthew 17:5). God the Father also said in that same chapter to the disciples that they must "*Listen to [Jesus]*" That is, the disciples must listen to the good news of the gospel that Jesus had come to bring for sinners.

Jesus is the righteous King who kept the law perfectly for his people, and became our substitute and our sacrifice. Jesus fulfilled the law by offering Himself as the full and final sacrifice for us as His people. Jesus is the solution to the crisis of Psalm 81, that the people would not listen. Jesus is the One who listened, who obeyed, who died, who rose again, and who now ever lives for us.

### **Conclusion:**

1. Hope in God. Remember that Psalm 81 is a Psalm used in festivals for celebration. It is because of the victory seen in the powerful ending. God's message to us is clear - God can bring hope out of the darkest situation. God can feed us with the finest of wheat. God can bring honey out of the rock. God's grace and God's resources are available. God is not lacking power. God is not lacking compassion. God gives the best of gifts. God brings the sweetest things (such as honey), out of the harshest things (such as a rock.) God brings His people gifts out of what is a forbidding circumstance. God fulfills His promises to us in situations that are completely unpromising. Hope in God.

2. Listen to God. Listen to God in your Scripture reading and personal praying and family praying. Listen to God in church worship. Good listening is like fine tuning a radio station. For good results, you can listen to only one station at a time. Trying to listen to a person speak while reading a book is like trying to receive two radio stations at the same time. We end up with distortion and frustration. Listening requires a choice of where we place my attention. To tune into our God, we must first choose to put away all that will divide our attention.

That might mean laying down the burdens of last week, moving away from the pressures of next week, setting aside the thoughts now going on in my mind, and giving my full attention to God. At the pace we live, this is going to take a decision, followed by effort. Listen to God. It is the heart of worship. *“He who has ears, let him hear.”* (Matthew 13:9)