

**Psalm 85 – Restore and Revive**  
**(Sunday, August 15, 2021)**

---

**Scripture: Ephesians 2:14-22; Psalm 85**

**INTRODUCTION**

We reject the idea of three easy steps, and yet we do rejoice in the guidance of God's Word.

We need the direction of Scripture.

We need the working of the Holy Spirit to obey what God has commanded.

We also recognize that God is sovereign, that He does not depend on us, nor can we manipulate God.

This is an aspect of what we might say is the mystery of God's gracious and sovereign work.

It is something that Scripture addresses.

One of the greatest promises in Scripture, Romans 8:28, is given in the context of famine, peril, and the sword.

I have mentioned before that Romans 8:28 is not understood in terms of I am glad I missed turning into Starbucks for coffee because Dunkin Donuts was giving away free donuts that day.

Our Psalm directs us not in terms of three easy steps and your life will be better, but it does direct you to consider God's graciousness, the spiritual needs that we have, and the great hope that we have in God's work.

**We remember God's past goodness and mercy, we plead for His present work, and we have confidence even in times of darkness.**

We will look at this beautiful Psalm in three parts:

- 1] Verses 1-3: God's Gracious Work in the Past
- 2] Verses 4-7: The Need for God's Sovereign Work Now
- 3] Verses 8-13: Waiting on the Lord and Confidence in God's Work

### 1] VERSES 1-3: GOD'S GRACIOUS WORK IN THE PAST

11 Psalms of the Sons of Korah

Spurgeon – David is the author; most commentators don't take this same view.

What is the background?

Captivity – verse 1

Does this mean the Babylonian captivity?

Other versions read, "restored the fortunes."

One lexicon says that literally the idea is **turn the turning, restore the fortunes of, bring about a restoration.**<sup>1</sup>

Similar language is found in the prophets for Elam, Moab, Sodom, and Ammon.

**Jer. 49:39**     "But it shall come to pass in the latter days:  
I will bring back the captives of Elam," says the LORD."

---

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Thompson / Elmer A. Martens, *NIDOTTE*, s.v. "4:58-59," v.

Boice – suggested that this Psalm was written during the time of the return from exile.

Since the heading does not specify more, we can't be dogmatic.

### **Interpretation of this Psalm**

Interpretation comes before application.

There are wonderful applications – individual and corporate.

Focus is on national Israel in terms of God's corporate grace and forgiveness and also a present expression of anger and punishment.

Now, it is true that a believer can grieve the Holy Spirit and fall into grievous sin, but the descriptions of this Psalm must be understood in a corporate sense.

Individual applications come from this.

We also consider how this Psalm does so beautifully point to the work of salvation in Jesus Christ.

There are several key words in this Psalm:

1] **return or restore**; 5 times: 1, 3, 4, 6, and 8.

Not always translated as restore.

Verse 6 – translated as **again**.

Verse 8 – turn back

2] **Revive** – connected with the idea of restored. Used only in verse 6.

### 3] **Righteousness**; 3 times: 10, 11, and 13

The opening verses look back to the sovereign and gracious work of God in bringing about restoration or return from captivity.

What is the focus of this reflection?

It is forgiveness, atonement, and propitiation or the turning away of God's wrath.

Why is this significant?

Isn't it the case that when we think of God's goodness, we generally think of health and wealth, or our family and work?

**We don't always put the priority on God's forgiveness and the satisfaction of His holy anger.**

Various commentators do properly suggest that in times of spiritual struggle or dryness, where we must begin is the incredible nature of God's grace to the believer.

Rejoice again in the knowledge of sins truly forgiven and covered by the blood of Christ.

We are no longer children of wrath.

A holy God's raging anger has been taken away.

Any other gifts God gives are all the more welcome, but truly cannot compare.

**Rom. 8:31** What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? **32** He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

## 2] VERSES 4-7: THE NEED FOR GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK NOW

If this Psalm was written during the time of the return from exile, then we can connect the great burden expressed in verses 4-7 with the history of Israel.

The return from exile was a time of incredible joy!

The only thing comparable was the mighty Exodus from Egypt.

But in returning there were all sorts of issues and problems.

There were political issues involving the most powerful rulers of the day.

There were also spiritual issues as the people focused more on building their own homes than they did restoring the true worship of God and building the temple.

The physical defenses of Jerusalem suffered greatly until the LORD raised up Nehemiah.

This Psalm, I am sure, has often been used in thinking about the subject of revival.

Iain Murray in his excellent book *Revival and Revivalism* discusses in the first chapter the work of a minister named Samuel Davies.

Davies was used in a mighty way by the Lord in the Great Awakening, though he died at the age of 37.

We sometimes forget how our nation though blessed by such a rich Christian heritage also demonstrated an incredible turning from the true faith in its early days.

Davies wrote of the spiritual condition of his age in this way:

How common, how fashionable is this lukewarm religion! This is the prevailing epidemical sin of our age and country... We have thousands of Christians, such as they are; as many Christians as white men; but, alas! they are generally of the Laodicean stamp; they are neither hot nor cold. But it is our first concern to know how it is with ourselves; therefore, let this inquiry go round this congregation: Are you not such lukewarm Christians? Is there any fire and life in your devotions? Or are not all your active powers engrossed by other pursuits?<sup>2</sup>

It is worth noting that the population of the 13 colonies in 1761 when Davies died was little more than 1 million.<sup>3</sup>

Another very important point to consider is the definition of what is revival.

Davies and other faithful ministers understood that man's natural condition is that,

"he cannot be saved without the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit. Regeneration, and the faith that results from it, are gifts of God. Therefore, wherever conversions are multiplied, the cause is to be found not in men, nor in favourable conditions, but in the abundant influences of the Spirit of God that alone make the testimony of the church effective. No other explanation of revival is in harmony with the truths that are the 'essence of the Christian scheme - the utter depravity of man, the sovereignly-free grace of Jehovah, the divinity of Christ, the atonement in his blood, regeneration and sanctification by the Holy Spirit.'"<sup>4</sup>

When God saves an individual sinner, that is a miracle of sovereign grace.

When God works to saved thousands of sinners, that is the same working of sovereign grace.

**The difference is in degree, not in kind.**<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*,

<sup>3</sup> Murray, 35.

<sup>4</sup> Murray, 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> Murray, 23.

I believe we also legitimately understand that an aspect of revival is also when true believers are more focused on spiritual, eternal matters, and the expansion of Christ's kingdom than the more trivial and mundane matters of the day.

Now we must be careful to not be hypocrites on this.

We all spend a lot of time on sleep, eating, housework, not to mention our ordinary labors.

But I do think we are right in looking at the words of our Lord in Matthew 6 in terms of what we have as our focus.

Are you more focused on food, clothing, and the like or God's work of grace in your life and in the lives of others?

**Matthew 6:33** But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Focusing back on Psalm 85, we can say that the Psalmist here is focused on spiritual matters and not just material or earthly concerns.

The nation, even though it had experienced such a wonder of God's grace, was not walking as it should have been in terms of God's truth.

It is not that God is capricious and changes.

It is not that He loves us one day is angry with us the next day.

We are the ones who change.

And I as mentioned earlier, we have to consider the corporate aspect here of the language.

If God's wrath has been satisfied in terms of the salvation of a believer, then that wrath has been satisfied to eternity.

But as a corporate group, God's wrath can be turned away and then return when there is a turning away from God's truth.

The prayer of these verses is for restoration, revival, mercy, and salvation.

I mentioned earlier that the verb restore in verse 4 is a key word of this Psalm.

The word in Hebrew, *shuv*, is used 1075 times, so you can imagine it has quite a few related meanings to it.

It is used both in good and bad ways – turning to the LORD and sadly turning away from the LORD.

Here the meaning of restore is that we be turned to the LORD and His truth.

**Heb. 10:22** let us **draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

**James 4:8** **Draw near** to God and He will **draw near** to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded.

The word **revive** in verse 6 is related.

More literally verse 6 could read: **Will you not return and let us live** that your people may rejoice in You?



Isn't this such a beautiful picture of true spiritual life that only God can bring?

You can fake a lot of things.

But it is God's work alone that leads individuals and His people as a larger group to rejoice in the Him.

Verse 7 the final verse of this section is important to consider as the basis for our crying out to God.

On what basis do you plead with God for His work?

It never can be what you have done, who we think we are.

We cry to the Lord asking for His mercy!

We plead for His salvation not because of who we are but because of who God is!

### **3] VERSES 8-13: WAITING ON THE LORD AND CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S WORK**

One evidence of the divine inspiration of Scripture is the beautiful harmony of God's Word.

One example would be the words of verse 8 compared with similar words in Habakkuk 2:1.

**Hab. 2:1** I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart, And watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected.

Notice also in verse 8, the Psalmist now writes in the first person singular, **I**.

It is not that the writer is alone, but perhaps the use of the singular is significant in this part of the Psalm.

We recognize that as believers we are together the church, the body of Christ.

It is not just me and Jesus alone.

On the other hand, we each have our individual duty and responsibilities before God and before others.

We observe in this final portion of the Psalm the two themes of waiting for the LORD to work along with a confidence in His future work of grace.

This is a beautiful combination.

**Confidence is not knowing when or how God will work as we pray and seek His face.**

Confidence is knowing that God does hear our prayers and that He will work according to what He has promised for His glory!

Wellington Family at VBS

The father of the family told how his great grandmother, I believe, was converted under the ministry of Amy Carmichael in India.

Carmichael died in India 70 years ago.<sup>6</sup>

Isn't it a beautiful testimony of God's grace to see generations of a family changed by God's power?

The writer expresses his confidence that God will work. He will speak peace to His people, His saints.

But may we not ever use God's blessings to turn back to folly.

Look at the final words of verse 8.

The words **turn back** translate the same verb *shuv*, a key word of this chapter.

---

<sup>6</sup> Amy Beatrice Carmichael (16 December 1867 – 18 January 1951).

When God brought judgment on His people the great expression of it was not simply the military invasion of the forces of Babylon.

In Ezekiel 10, Ezekiel records the vision that he was given of the glory of the LORD leaving the temple.

**Ex. 24:16** Now the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.

In Haggai 2 one of the promises given is that God would again fill the temple with His glory.

All of these passages are a reminder of what is most important about God's work.

What we should most desire is that God's glory and presence would be known among His people according to His grace.

**Psa. 72:19** And blessed *be* His glorious name forever! And let the whole **earth be filled** *with* His glory. Amen and Amen.

**Hab. 2:14** For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD,  
As the **waters cover** the sea.

This Psalm as I mentioned earlier is often used in the context of revival.

I would also argue that it has particularly become famous because of verse 10.

**Psa. 85:10** Mercy and truth have met together;  
Righteousness and peace have kissed.

Fifteen times in the OT you have this combination of mercy and truth.

**Psa. 86:15** But You, O Lord, *are* a God full of compassion, and gracious,  
Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.

Verse 10 is not speaking of the bringing together of opposites in anyway.

Rather what we have in this verse is the description of the perfection of God's attributes coming together to bring the fullness of our good and salvation.

It is in verse 10 that we certainly have a foreshadowing of the cross.

Mercy, truth, righteousness, and peace are nowhere else so brightly displayed as in the horror and darkness and suffering of our Lord on the cross.

Spurgeon wrote about those who hated the idea of substitutionary atonement, that the Lord Jesus Christ died in the place of ruined sinners.

He said:

Their doctrine of atonement has well been described by Dr. Duncan as the admission "that the Lord Jesus Christ did something or other, which somehow or other, was in some way or other connected with man's salvation." This is their substitute for substitution.<sup>7</sup>

It would be very easy in our own age to be filled with despair.

How great is the weakness and apostasy of so much of the visible church!

We see the speed at which judgment is coming upon our own nation.

We are living in very dark times!

---

<sup>7</sup> Treasury of David, s.v. Psalm 85:10.

And yet there is a confidence that we are to have as God's people not knowing in particular the details of God's plan, but knowing that God is working all things according to His eternal plan.

The LORD will save all of His elect, Jew and Gentile together in His own perfect timing.

Though this world is not eternal our service to Christ has eternal character and fruit.

**1Cor. 15:58** Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

**This is why we remember God's past goodness and mercy, we plead for His present work, and we have confidence even in times of darkness.**

## CONCLUSION

Charles Spurgeon wrote of verse 8.

Backsliders should study this verse with the utmost care, it will console them and yet warn them, draw them back to their allegiance, and at the same time inspire them with a wholesome fear of going further astray. To turn again to folly is worse than being foolish for once; it argues wilfulness and obstinacy, and it involves the soul in sevenfold sin. There is no fool like the man who will be a fool cost him what it may.

1] Individual application

2] Desiring to see the glory of God manifested in the salvation of sinners and the strengthening of His church.

Closing Hymn – Psalm 85B

### **Benediction - 1 Timothy 3:16**

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh,  
Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world,  
Received up in glory.