

## Revive Us Again

*Psalm 85*

Pastor Jason Van Bemmell

### To the choirmaster. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah.

- <sup>1</sup> LORD, you were favorable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
- <sup>2</sup> You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you covered all their sin. *Selah*
- <sup>3</sup> You withdrew all your wrath;  
you turned from your hot anger.
- <sup>4</sup> Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away your indignation toward us!
- <sup>5</sup> Will you be angry with us forever?  
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?
- <sup>6</sup> Will you not revive us again,  
that your people may rejoice in you?
- <sup>7</sup> Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,  
and grant us your salvation.
- <sup>8</sup> 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.
- <sup>9</sup> Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,  
that glory may dwell in our land.
- <sup>10</sup> Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other.
- <sup>11</sup> Faithfulness springs up from the ground,  
and righteousness looks down from the sky.
- <sup>12</sup> Yes, the LORD will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.
- <sup>13</sup> Righteousness will go before him  
and make his footsteps a way.

### Intro: The Good News – Bad News – Good News Story

Human beings seem hard-wired to appreciate a good news-bad news-good news story. When I was a school administrator, and I was teaching teachers how to do parent-teacher conferences, I taught them to always begin and end every parent-teacher conference with good news – say truthful, positive things about the student at the beginning and at the end of the conference and sandwich the “areas for growth” in the middle. It helps parents understand and receive the constructive criticism when it is framed by the good news that the teacher really does know and appreciate the child and is thankful for the opportunity to teach them.

Most popular books and movies follow this general story arc, too: They begin with a relatively happy and stable situation that then gets thrown into complete chaos and upheaval before the conflict is resolved in the climax of the story and things return to good – ideally, to being even better than they were at the beginning of the story.

I do think we are hard-wired for this kind of story pattern because that is, in fact, the story of the world: When God created the world, He declared that it was all “very good” and He established a loving covenant with Adam and Eve, who were made in His image and who enjoyed fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden. Then, sin entered the world through the rebellion of Adam and Eve, plunging all creation into the darkness of death and decay. Sin brought people into a multi-faceted alienation, as they were alienated from God, from one another, from creation – which was now hostile and deadly for people, and even from themselves. And the world lives in the reality of this fallen alienation today –

- The world doesn’t seek or worship God.
- We are at war with one another in various ways at almost every level of human relationships.
- We pollute and corrupt the creation.
- We are alienated within ourselves with shame, depression, isolation, fear, anxiety, anger, guilt, and more.

Thankfully, the bad news of our world is NOT the end of the story. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to fulfill His good and holy will, take our sinful rebellion on Himself on the cross, reconcile alienated sinners to God, call us into a loving community where we are reconciled to one another, and He has promised that Jesus will come again to gloriously restore the fallen creation to be better than it ever was, along with all who trust in Him and are looking forward to His return. Thus, the story of the world is the ultimate good news – bad news – good news – better news story.

But it’s not just the story of the world that follows this familiar trajectory. For the believer in Jesus, our salvation as we experience it in this world and in the glory to come is also often felt as a good news – bad news – good news story. And that’s the story we find the people of God in

when we turn to Psalm 85. God has been so good to them in the past: He has shown His favor and restored the fortunes of His people. And He has spoken a good word about the good He will do: He will speak peace to His people. He will give what is good. But in the present, they are struggling, asking hard questions, and pleading for revival, for joy, for steadfast love, and for salvation from God.

### I. The Favor God Has Shown, vv. 1-3

Whenever we are in the midst of a difficult season as believers in Christ, it is always helpful to look back, look up, and look ahead, to put our current difficulties in perspective. This is what we see the people of God doing in Psalm 85: They begin by looking back at God's goodness to them in the past:

- <sup>1</sup> LORD, you were favorable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
- <sup>2</sup> You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you covered all their sin. Selah
- <sup>3</sup> You withdrew all your wrath;  
you turned from your hot anger.

Psalm 85 opens by addressing God by His covenant name, YaHWeH, translated as LORD in all caps. This is significant because it sets this whole psalm in a covenantal context – that is, this is a prayer to God from His people, and they are calling on Him as their God who has entered into covenant with them and pledged Himself to them to be their God.

God's covenant name, YaHWeH, not only reflects the relationship He has with His people, but it also reflects His own character as the great I AM. "I am who I am," YahWeH told Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3, and this became His name by which He is known to His people – YaHWeH, the great I AM. I am who I have been and always will be. Hebrews 13:8 reflects this character in Jesus when it says, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever." God speaks this character of Himself in Revelation 1:8: "*I am the Alpha and the Omega,*" says the Lord God, "*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*" Unchanging self-sufficiency marks the essence of God's being and character – never changing, never failing, never needing. By having this be the first word, Psalm 85 is anchoring all of our hopes, longings, and expectation on this firm and unwavering Rock.

"*You were favorable*" – speaks of God's delight in His people in showing them His favor – "*You delighted in Your people and showed them your favor*" is the sense of it. It reminds me of what Jesus said to His disciples in John 15:16: "*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*" (ESV) Or Psalm 65:4: "*Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to*



This is the good news that begins our Christian lives and ever remains the foundation of our Christian lives: God has chosen to be good to us, to delight in us, and He has forgiven us. Christianity is not an effort on our part to earn favor and forgiveness; it rests on the foundation that God has freely given His favor and forgiveness to us.

## II. The Favor We Need: Revival, vv. 4-7

And yet, that doesn't mean that the Christian life is a bed of roses, an uninterrupted story of joy and gladness. As long as we live in a fallen world and struggle with sinful hearts, we will endure hardship. The key is, does the hardship cause us to seek the Lord more earnestly or to hide from Him in anger, resentment, or shame. Psalm 85 clearly shows us how to seek the Lord and cry out to Him in our hardships:

*<sup>4</sup> Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away your indignation toward us!*  
*<sup>5</sup> Will you be angry with us forever?  
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?*  
*<sup>6</sup> Will you not revive us again,  
that your people may rejoice in you?*  
*<sup>7</sup> Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,  
and grant us your salvation.*

This heartfelt plea is passionate and urgent, and it is also deeply rooted in who God is, what He has promised, and why His people need Him so deeply. At the heart of the plea are these requests:

- Restore us again
- Revive us again
- Show us Your steadfast love
- Grant us Your salvation

The first plea is for God to “restore us again” – literally to turn us back. Some translations say “revise us again,” but that’s a bit confusing because the word used for “revive us” in verse 6 is a different word. So, turn us back to You again, O God of our salvation.

Because they have turned their hearts away from God, they are suffering and they are feeling that God is angry with them and is disciplining them. So, they ask for God to put away His anger and indignation and ask “Will you not revive us again?” Here, revive means to make us live again, to quicken our hearts from being cold and lifeless to being lively and responsive to Him.

This is the bad news that so often comes into the lives of believers after the good news of our forgiveness and before the coming better news of eternal glory with Christ. Sometimes, we turn away from the Lord and our hearts grow cold and dead toward Him. Maybe it comes because we're frustrated with some aspect of God's providence – someone we love dies, an urgent prayer we've been praying appears to go unanswered. Sometimes, it's a sin issue that takes deep root in our lives and we're unable or unwilling to repent. Sometimes, it's a faceless and seemingly causeless spiritual depression. Some have called this "The dark night of the soul" – periods of time when God feels distant, maybe even angry, our prayers don't seem to leave the room, and when we do read God's word, it seems lifeless and doesn't penetrate our hearts.

When we're in this state, we need God to turn us and give us life anew. We need God to change our hearts and stir us by His Holy Spirit. In doing this for us, we need God to show us His steadfast love and His salvation. Now, "steadfast love" and "salvation" are probably the two most wonderful words in the Psalms, apart from the name of the LORD.

We've talked about "steadfast love" – *hesed* – before. This is almost untranslatable word that reflects God's heart toward His own. The truth is that, when God has shown us His favor and forgives us of our sins, and we turn away from Him and disobey Him and harden our hearts toward Him, we really have no right to ask for God to turn us back to Himself and to revive us again. We don't deserve it. God has already been so good to us, and we have turned away from Him out of disappointment or anger or sin or selfishness or whatever. We have no right to expect more goodness from God, but God's steadfast love, God's merciful lovingkindness, God's gracious and committed love for His own, despite our hardness and sinfulness – This gives us great hope. So, "Show us your steadfast love, O LORD!" O YaHWeH, O unchanging self-sufficient, never-wavering One who has made a covenant with us by Your grace, show us your *hesed*, Your gracious, undeserved, patient, restoring, holy steadfast love.

"and grant us Your salvation" – In Hebrew, the word salvation is "YeShua" and it is the Hebrew name for Jesus, whose name is salvation, for the angel Gabriel told Joseph in Matthew 1:21, "*you shall call his name Jesus (YeShua), for he will save his people from their sins.*" So, when we pray "grant us Your salvation, we're asking for God to save us from our sins through Jesus our salvation.

### III. The Good Word God Speaks: Peace, vv. 8-9

And with this word "salvation," we're then told God's response to His people's plea. What does God say when we cry out to Him from the dark night of the soul, from the coldness and the hardness?

<sup>8</sup> 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.

**<sup>9</sup> Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,**  
that glory may dwell in our land.

“He will speak peace to His people” Why? Because “surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him.”

Ephesians 2 tells us that He Himself, that is, Jesus Himself, is our peace. God speaks peace to His people through the Word of God incarnate who comes to make peace and to be our peace. God’s salvation, His *YeShua*, His Jesus, is near to those who fear Him, to those who trust Him, trembling with joy at the undeserved goodness of His steadfast love shown in Jesus Christ.

When God speaks this word of peace in Jesus Christ, we’re told that it’s vital for us to listen, to hear what He speaks, and to not turn back again to folly, to not turn back again to our selfishness, our coldness, but to hear and receive the peace God speaks.

#### **IV. The Basis of Our Hope, vv. 10-13**

Then, we’re immediately taken and given a picture of the peace that God speaks and of the salvation that is near to those who fear Him, and it comes in one of the most unexpected and poetic pictures of the cross we find in the Old Testament:

<sup>10</sup> Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other.

<sup>11</sup> Faithfulness springs up from the ground,  
and righteousness looks down from the sky.

“Steadfast love” is God’s heart to be good toward His own people in an undeserved, merciful, gracious, and committed way. “Faithfulness” is also translated as “truth” and it reflects God’s unwavering commitment to be true to His own holiness and His own integrity, His own character. So, God is steadfastly committed to BOTH loving His people with grace and mercy even though we don’t deserve it to His own perfect holiness and His own integrity. He will not change His holy standard and cannot bend from it.

Righteousness is the justice of God and peace is the shalom, the abundance of well-being and right relationship with God. Think about it this way: Steadfast love and peace – *hesed* and *shalom* – is what we long for, what we need from God. Faithfulness, or truth, and righteousness, or justice, are what God must always uphold. Just as surely as He is the God of steadfast love and peace, so He is also the God of truth and justice. But truth and justice require the punishment of sin and sinners who so wantonly and repeatedly violate God’s holy standard. God is not a corrupt judge or an incompetent law-enforcer, so that He could just be bribed or just look the other way.

Somehow, somewhere, steadfast love and faithfulness must meet; righteousness and peace must kiss each other to honor God's character as Holy, Holy, Holy, and for us to receive good favor, mercy, grace, and peace from God.

Faithfulness and righteousness must be upheld. Verse 11 shows us how:

*Faithfulness springs up from the ground,  
and righteousness looks down from the sky.*

A man who is perfectly faithful, who keeps covenant without wavering, who is the Truth in human form, offers Himself up freely, while holy justice, eternal and perfect righteousness looks down from the sky. This is the cross of Jesus Christ, the Faithful One, where He offered Himself freely for us, to fulfill all righteousness, to satisfy the need for faithfulness, and to pour out of His wounds strong steadfast love and peace to His own.

This is how Colossians 1 unpacks and explains this compelling picture of the work of Jesus on the cross:

*in him [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

*And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him – Colossians 1:19-22, ESV*

This is the salvation of God. This is the fulfillment of the beautiful picture of verses 10-11, and this is the source of our peace, our hope, our life with God. If you will not come to God through the cross, then you are not hearing the word of peace that He speaks, but you are busy trying to speak or create your own, and you are, in fact, turning back again to folly. No man can redeem himself or another. Only the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross can bring together truth and love, justice and peace, righteousness and mercy. So, if we would be turned back to God, we must be turned back to the cross, back to Jesus.

Do you doubt that God is faithful? Look to the cross and believe. Do you doubt that God keeps His promises? He will always keep them, even at the cost of His Son. Do you doubt that God really loves you? God demonstrates His love, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Do you doubt whether or not you can truly trust Him? Jesus trusted His Father on the cross, crying out, "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit," and the Father heard His Son and raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand on the highest throne.

Do you doubt, thinking somehow that something might keep you from the Father's steadfast love for you?

*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be<sup>l</sup> against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us – Romans 8:31-34, ESV*

The last two verses of Psalm 85 answer all of our doubts and lay out the future God has prepares for us as we continue to follow Him in this world, until we reach our eternal home:

*Yes, the LORD will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.  
Righteousness will go before him  
and make his footsteps a way. – Psalm 85:12-13, ESV*

God who gave His Son to make peace will give what is good. He will make us fruitful for His glory among us. And the righteousness of Jesus the Righteous One is the Captain of our Salvation and the Pioneer of our Faith, who has gone on before us and who has called us to follow Him, trust in Him, walking in His footsteps until He leads us all the way home.