

“Turn Us, O God”
Psalm 80
(Preached at Trinity, September 18, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. The following words are from a letter penned in 1741 by Jonathan Edwards at the height of the Great Awakening.
“Neither earth nor hell can hinder God’s work that is going on in the country. Christ gloriously triumphs at this day . . . By what I can understand, the work of God is greater at this day in the land than it has been at any time. O what cause have we, with exulting hearts, to agree to give glory to him who thus rides forth in the chariot of his salvation, conquering and to conquer.”
 - A. Men and women, young and old felt the overwhelming presence of God. Unbelievers felt a profound conviction of their sin and Christians were stirred over their own sin. Many believers were stirred by the presence of God and as Edwards wrote, “passed under a very remarkable work of the Spirit of God, as if they had been the subjects of a second conversion.”
 - B. In a letter Sarah Edwards wrote to her brother describing the preaching of George Whitefield,
“It is wonderful to see what a spell he casts over an audience by proclaiming the simplest truths of the Bible. I have seen upwards of a thousand people hang on his words with breathless silence, broken only by an occasional half-suppressed sob. He speaks from a heart all aglow with love, and pours out a torrent of eloquence which is almost irresistible. Many, very many persons in Northampton date the beginning of new thoughts, new desires, new purposes, and a new life, from the day on which they heard him preach of Christ and this salvation.”
2. Such was the powerful preaching and changed lives that flooded New England during the Great Awakening. What was the cause of this great transforming power? Was it the eloquent preaching of these powerful preachers? To this we must answer, NO!! The power rested in the sovereign work of God. God alone. Ian Murray wrote about the Great Awakening – “Nor can the impact of personalities, in itself, account for the change. It is evident that the results of the Great Awakening were not in invariable proportion to the presence or absence of certain of the best known figures. The leading preachers did not have consistent success *after the Great Awakening*: sermons, repeated with the same earnestness as before, could differ markedly in result. And the days which were longest to be remembered were not the outcome of carefully made arrangements.”
3. There is only one true source of every revival. The mighty hand of God. Ian Murray writes again: “The history of religious revival proves that all real, spiritual awakenings of the national mind have been those in which God and not man, has been the prime mover.”
4. Why do I begin Psalm 80 in this way? Because at the heart of **Psalm 80** is the recognition that God is the power behind every transformation of the human heart.

5. There is a chorus that rings out three times in this psalm in **Verses 3, 7, & 19**.
Psalm 80:3 KJV - "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."
1. Is this referring to a spiritual "turning" or a physical restoration of Israel to their land?
 It could be said that "turn us again" is referring to a plea for God to restore Israel to their land. The Hebrew word שׁוּב is very common occurring 1066 times in the OT. It carries a wide range of meanings.
 Most of our English translations translate the word in this passage, "restore," "Restore us, O God."
 2. It has a ring of the Aaronic blessing from Numbers 6
Numbers 6:24-26 KJV - "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: ²⁵ The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: ²⁶ The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."
6. The best way to resolve the question is to examine the context of the psalm. What is the context of the **Psalm 80**? What is the historical setting? Some believe it to be the same as the situation we've addressed in **Psalms 79 & 74** – a cry of Israel for restoration from their captivity in Babylon.
- A. The problem with this is the Babylonian captivity involved the southern kingdom and began with the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.
Verse 2 speaks of Ephraim and Manasseh which were two of the important northern tribes which fell to the Assyrian armies in 721 B.C.
 And **Verse 1** refers to God as the "Shepherd of Israel." The northern kingdom was called Israel while the southern kingdom was called Judah.
 - B. This psalm appears to take place before the destruction of Jerusalem. It seems to be a plea from Israel before its fall to the Assyrian army in 721 B.C.
 - C. Or it could be coming from the Southern kingdom as they observed the terrible defeat and destruction of the northern kingdom. As they witnessed the destruction Asaph cries out for God to turn them from their own wickedness.
7. Either way, the plea seems to be more spiritual in nature than for a physical restoration. I agree with Spurgeon – "It is not so much said, "turn our captivity, "but "turn us." All will come right if we are right. The best turn is not that of circumstances but of character."
8. **Psalm 80** is a plea for restoration, not simply restoration from a national defeat but a plea for a spiritual renewal from the ravages of sin; from turning from God to a plea for God to turn them back to Himself.
Psalm 80 can be divided into three stanza's each ending with the chorus:
 "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."
- I. **Verses 1-3** – Asaph requests God's favor upon his people
 - II. **Verses 4-7** –Asaph recoils at God's punishment of his people
 - III. **Verses 8-15** – Asaph remembers from whence they had fallen

I. **Verses 1-3** – Asaph requests God’s favor upon his people

- A. Asaph appeals to God on the basis of covenant
1. Asaph pleases to God as Israel’s Shepherd
Psalm 80:1 KJV - "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock"
 2. They were God’s own particular people. Like a shepherd cares for his own particular flock, he knows his own and they follow him, Asaph is appealing to God as Israel’s Shepherd.
 3. This is the heart of Isaiah 40:11
Isaiah 40:11 KJV - "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom, *and* shall gently lead those that are with young."
 4. Jesus develops this idea in John 10
John 10:14-15 KJV - "I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep*, and am known of mine. ¹⁵ As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep."
 5. Again, the writer of Hebrews brings out the same truth:
Hebrews 13:20-21 KJV - " Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen."
 6. The point is a shepherd guards his flock. He protects them from danger. He feeds them and provides for them. And He keeps them from wandering. Asaph is praying, “O God, turn us!”
 7. This must be our prayer as well, especially when we find our hearts growing cold – “O God, turn us” or “Turn ME!”
- B. Asaph was also pleading before God on the basis of mercy
Psalm 80:1 KJV - "thou that dwellest *between* the cherubims"
1. Upon the cover of the Ark of the Covenant were two cherubims facing one another with their wings extended.
 - a. God was said to dwell between them. The cover of the Ark of the Covenant was considered the throne of God. It represented His abiding presence with Israel.
 - b. It spoke of God’s might and power, His rule and dominion
Hezekiah prayed:
2 Kings 19:15 KJV - "And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest *between* the cherubims, thou art the God, *even* thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth."
 - c. Psalm 99 - **Psalm 99:1 KJV** - "The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble: he sitteth *between* the cherubims; let the earth be moved."
 2. But the cover of the Ark was also called the “Mercy Seat”—the place where God demonstrated His mercy upon Israel.

3. Asaph recognized the sinfulness of Israel and sought God's mercy in turning them.
4. The word for "save" in **Verse 2** is **יְשׁוּעָה** - the Hebrew word attributed to Jesus – also translated Joshua.

C. Asaph also recognized that only God had the power to do this.

Psalms 80:2 KJV - "stir up thy strength, and come *and* save us."

1. The word for "strength" refers to great power or great exertion. It can be translated "might."
Deuteronomy 3:24 KJV - "O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God *is there* in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?"
2. Only God can do this mighty act, and if God does it it will be done.
Psalms 80:3 KJV - "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."
3. We need to pray diligently to the God of all salvation to make our Gospel work effectual

II. **Verses 4-7** –Asaph recoils at God's punishment of his people

A. In this passage we find the reason for Asaph's passionate plea

1. God was angry at Israel's sin – sin always has consequences
2. It had even turned God's ears away from their prayers
Psalms 80:4 KJV - " O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?"
3. They had been made to eat and drink tears and had become the taunt of their neighbors
Perhaps the reference here is the taunting of the Assyrian king Sennacherib towards Hezekiah
Isaiah 36:13-15 KJV - "Hear ye the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. ¹⁴ Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you. ¹⁵ Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us: this city shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria."
Isaiah 36:18 KJV - "*Beware* lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, The LORD will deliver us. Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?"
Hezekiah's prayer:
Isaiah 37:17 KJV - "Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God."
4. Asaph's plea to God – "Turn us again, O God."

B. This must be our heart

1. At the first sign of sin we should cry out
2. And even if we have fallen under God's chastisement we should cry out "Turn us again, O God."

III. Verses 8-15 – Asaph remembers from whence they had fallen

- A. Asaph considers God's gracious work in Israel's past
1. God had carefully planted the nation as a farmer plants his vineyard.
Psalm 80:8-9 KJV - "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. ⁹ Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land."
 2. God cared for her and her roots ran deep and broad
Psalm 80:11 KJV - "She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river."
 3. So why would God then destroy His vineyard?
Psalm 80:12 KJV - "Why hast thou *then* broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her?"
 4. Because of her sin!!
Isaiah 5:1-6 KJV - "Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: ² And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. ³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. ⁴ What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? ⁵ And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; *and* break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: ⁶ And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it."
Psalm 80:16 KJV - " *It is* burned with fire, *it is* cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance."
- B. Did God utterly destroy them?
1. If this psalm was written before the fall of the northern kingdom we find a sad end to the story. God did not cause His face to shine upon them. Why, because of their unrepentant heart.
 2. We must remember that God although Israel suffered under God's sore displeasure He did not forget His promise. Through the church God has restored His vineyard.
John 15:1-5 KJV - "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. ² Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. ³ Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

3. Is this the Son of Man mentioned in **Verse 17**
Psalm 80:17 KJV - "Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man *whom* thou madest strong for thyself."
 Spurgeon: "There is no doubt here an outlook to the Messiah, for whom believing Jews had learned to look as the Saviour in time of trouble."
 David Dickson: "The perpetuity of the church, and the perseverance of the saints, is founded upon the sufficiency of Christ; and the unfeigned believer may assure himself, as of the continuance of the church, so of his own perseverance and constant communion with God through him."

Conclusion:

1. This psalm must serve as a warning to all men
 - A. Lost person: you can pray that God will be merciful and turn your wicked heart towards Him, but you must have a desire to turn.
 - B. The perfect harmony between God's sovereignty and human responsibility always stands before us.
 - a. On one hand it is certainly true that God turns our hearts:
Psalm 80:3 KJV - "Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved."
 - b. On the other hand it is also true that we have a duty to turn:
Ezekiel 33:11 KJV - "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"
2. God is able to turn multitudes to Himself. But for those who hear and continue to rebel against Him He hardens them even further under the Gospel.
 We read further from Jonathan Edwards about the Great Awakening from Ian Murray's biography on Edwards:
 "Other meetings were held for young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty-six. The younger members of this age group, together with the children, were to provide the largest number of hopeful converts. Those who were already grown-up at the time of the work of the Spirit in 1735, and who had witnessed that revival without coming to the obedience of faith, seemed now to be almost wholly passed over and let alone."