
Reviving the Church

Psalm 85

Overview

Text: Psalm 85

Topic: How God gives His delight to those under His discipline.

Theme: Through memories savored, mercies sought and miracles sworn God's people under God's discipline desire God's revival.

Target: To awaken God's people who are under God's discipline a sense of expectancy that God can give new life.

Structure

1. Memories savored (vv.1-3)
 - a. Restored fortunes
 - b. Forgave iniquity
 - c. Withdrew wrath
2. Mercies sought (vv.4-7)
 - a. Restore us again
 - b. Prolong not Your anger
 - c. Rejoice in You
 - d. See steadfast love
3. Miracles sworn
 - a. Speaks peace (v.8)
 - b. Glory dwells (v.9)
 - c. Covenant kiss (v.10)
 - d. Faithfulness grows (v.11)
 - e. Goodness is given (v.12)
 - f. God walks among us (v.13)

The Big Idea: God gives His delight to those under His discipline.

Introduction

From barren to buds, from brown to green, from dreary to sunny, from gray to blue; springtime revives the slumber of wintertime. This is what I like about our current season. And this is what I like about Psalm 85.

Psalm 85, our text for this morning, expresses this very thought. It's a movement from sparse to plenty, from dissatisfaction to God-centered joy. It finds God's people under God's discipline desiring God's revival. Let's listen to this Psalmist as he expresses this desire. (read the text and pray)

Memories Savored

The Psalm is organized in a past, present and future structure. In vv.1-3 we find what it was like. In v.4-7 we hear what they want it to be like. And in vv.8-12 we see what it will be like.

A tension is sensed in the discontinuity between past joy and present misery. The Psalm's development shows us how *God gives His delight to those under His discipline.*

This process begins with memories savored. We see this in vv.1-3.

There is an assumed context in this Psalm. In vv.1-3 we see the people of God remembering past joys. It appears that these verses talk about God's miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from Babylon. After 70 years of adverse consequences as a result of their sin, God led his people back to the land in 538 BC. They were to rebuild the Temple and reinstitute their worship practices. In Ezra we get a snap shot of this joy. "And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy" (Ezra 6:16; cf. context, 6:14-22)

Restored Fortunes

The first memory savored was about their "restored fortunes". This references the return from captivity. When their Sovereign God moved upon the heart of a pagan king; King Cyrus (cf. Ezra 1:1), they were allowed to go back to the promised land. Much celebration occurred over this event.

They were liberated from the enemy. They were set free to worship their God. They were given new life. This was the starting of their enjoyable reminiscence.

Look with me further at vv.1-3 and notice a couple other components to their joy.

Forgave Iniquity

“You forgave the iniquity of our people; you covered all their sin”. Through their sacrificial system, God reminded His people that He forgives all sin on the basis of a substitute offering. The believing Israelites were forgiven of their iniquities based upon the sacrifices offered by a high priest. As the writer of Hebrews said, “For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins”. David, in Ps.32 said of this joy, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered”.

The people in Ps.85 savored this memory. They recalled the fresh joy of forgiveness. Happiness flooded their minds as they believed that God laid their sin upon something (or Someone) other than themselves. All their sins were covered by the blood of a sacrifice. The recollection of forgiveness was pleasant for them. But, as we will notice in a moment, this memory stirred up dissatisfaction. They remembered a joy in the past. And they wanted it back.

Withdrew Wrath

Savoring the memories of how God brought them back from captivity, how God forgave all their sin and now we see another component to their past joys. “You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger”. Oh, how the Psalmist remembers what it was like to be out from under the heated and heavy discipline of the Lord. Peace and joy welled up in their hearts. Closeness to God was their delight. The smile of God was their celebration. This was truly a memory savored.

Therefore, verse 1-3 serve to make clear what God did for the Israelites in the past. The Psalmist had sweet memories of God’s actions. He savored God’s work in their lives by listing some components of his joy. God brought them out of captivity and back into the land. God forgave all their iniquity. God withdrew His wrath from them. These memories he savored.

But these memories also haunted him. As we move into vv.4-7, we do not sense rest, satisfaction and a glowing joy. Actually, it is just the opposite.

You can sense the writer's anguish and urgency in the transition from vv.1-3 to vv.4-7 can't you? He is pleading with God. One gets the impression that memories savored spurred the writer to want something more.

In the absence of joy, past joy prompted him to pray for present joy. Savoring the memories of God's work caused him to seek the mercies of God's present work. The "remember whens..." only stirred up prayer for revival. This is what we see when we turn our attention to vv.4-7

Mercies Sought

Restore us again

This paragraph is the heart of the Psalm. The poet wants what they had in the past. He urgently pleads with God for fresh grace. This plea starts off with asking God to "Restore us again". His recollection of the past prompted him to desire restoration for the present. The word "Again" tells us that the thoughts of vv.1-3 stirred him up to pray. He did not want to be under the discipline of the Lord any longer. The heavy hand of God was not desired. The joy of the Lord was his plea!

And so, the first mercy sought was restoration. This phrase is to be understood by noticing the parallelism found in v.4 "Restore us again" corresponds with the second part of v.4; "put away our indignation". In short, what we are to understand is that when God's indignation is put away, God's restoration is brought about. He is asking, in effect, for God to lift His discipline from them.

Prolong not Your anger

This interpretation is consistent with what follows. In v.5 we sense the poet's urgency. The second mercy sought can be summarized as "Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? The use of the words "forever" and "prolong" tell us that they have been under God's discipline for awhile. Because the poet never calls for repentance and does not talk about their sin in the present, we can surmise that the reason for the discipline is their spiritual complacency. The Israelites enjoyed God's blessings at the end of the captivity. There was much joy

and celebration. But following this restoration came a time in which the Israelites coasted. They were not seeking the Kingdom of God first. They had lost their first love. They were lukewarm. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your strength, with all your soul, with all your mind” was not their motto. They had lost their fervency for God’s glory. And so, they were under the discipline of the Lord. Due to a recollection of better days and due to the pain of present discipline, the poet was seeking new displays of lovingkindness from the Lord.

Rejoice in You

The sweetness of the past was memories precious to them precisely because they are not currently experiencing them. The joy of the Lord had shriveled. Rejoicing in God was but a faint echo of their past. They had grown complacent. Finally, this became unacceptable. In v.6 we arrive at the epicenter of the Psalm. Here we come to the heart of the heart of the Psalm. This is the sum total of what the poet was after. “Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you”? Mercies sought because memories were savored brought the Psalmist to a crescendo. He longed for joy in God. He had it in the past. He is under the discipline of God now. And so, he yearns for a revival.

The wording of v.6 suggests not that God might respond. Rather it assumes a “yes” answer. God’s disposition is one of all-sufficient, ever-giving, never-changing gladness. He is known in scripture as “the fountain of living waters” (cf. Jer.2:13). When His people have under discipline awakened to the fact that they want God above all else, He delights to give new life to the thirsty (quote Ps.63:1-3 to whet thirst for God).

And notice one other thing about this key verse. It’s all about God. The One who gives this joy is God. And the ones who receive it are “Your people”. Do you see the highlight of this verse? God delights far more to give grace to the seeking than give discipline to the complacent. God delights to see His people rejoicing under His grace rather than to hear them groaning under His discipline. As Matthew Henry (one of those God-besotted puritans of the past) once said, “The happiness of the subjects is the glory of the Sovereign”.

See steadfast love

The last way the poet states his mercy seeking is in the phrase “Show us your steadfast love”. He not only wants to know about God’s covenant love, he wants God to demonstrate it in visible ways. To see the discipline lifted and see the aftermath of grace was the yearning of this prayer.

Recap

The point of this Psalm is clear. Those under God’s discipline due to drifting must be roused. Hardships, dried-up joy and thoughts of by-gone grace must prompt prayer for fresh joy; joy in God. As people under discipline do this, God’s propensity is to restore the joy shriveled. Revival occurs when God does this.

And what does revival look like?

Miracles Sworn

This takes us to the third and final paragraph of Ps.85. In vv.1-3 we found what it was like. (Can you remember what it was like? Can you look in the rearview mirror and see gladness in God? Happiness in holiness? Joy in Jesus? See Rev.2:1ff to notice that “good churches need revival”) In v.4-7 we heard what they wanted it to be like. And now vv.8-12 we see what it will be like.

These verses carry the picture of the end times. An eschatological impression is given when one reads vv.8-13. But these verses do not describe only the End. They answer the cry of vv.4-7. God promises to speak peace and cause His glory to dwell in the land and to renew covenant intimacy and to cause faithfulness to grow and to give goodness and to walk among His people! These are miracles sworn according to vv.8, 9, 12. In Isa.45:8 we read “Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down righteousness; let the earth open that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit; let the earth cause them both to sprout; I the Lord have created it”.

Could it be that the poet is using Isaiah’s theology to describe foretastes of end times joy to depict present-day revivals? Let’s take these promises and simply scroll down them to whet our appetite to pray for revival.

Speaks peace

Verse 8 is calculated to awaken in all loyal hearts a sense of expectancy. As the God of the Universe approaches His people, what is his greeting? Peace (cf. Eph.2:17)! Shalom falls from His lips to all who yearn for His filling. And who is Peace? The Prince of Peace; Jesus Christ! God approaches His saints with the Name Jesus. But once peace is heard and enjoyed, don't turn back to folly (preach a bit on perseverance).

Glory dwells

The next miracle promised is seen in v.9. Glory is to dwell in our midst. And who is this glory? Jesus Christ. According to Jn.1:14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory..." According to Jn.16:14, the Spirit who resides in all believes glorifies Jesus. Revival will magnify the glory of Jesus so that He will be conspicuous amid His people (Hab.2:14 – "For the earth will be filled...").

Covenant intimacy

Verse 10 is a tender promise. All the covenant promises made to God's people in Jesus will not be abstract. There is nothing theoretical about theology. Rather, theology is fuel for doxology. God's people will not merely be able to recite content of the covenant. His promises will meet and greet and kiss one another. I take this to mean that there will be sweet communion in His steadfast love and faithfulness and righteousness and peace. We will not merely know about these promises. They will be kissing in front of us and all around us and upon us.

Faithfulness grows

Verse 11 suggests that when God grants revival, God's people sprout in faithfulness. That there will be qualitative growth from a revival is witnessed in this verse. Authenticity of God's people will be seen. Hypocrisy will be rooted. Truthfulness will be the norm.

Goodness given

No need to fear the revival sought in v.6; for all of it is good according to v.12. This goodness will be enjoyed and it will be effectual. When God gives goodness through revival God's people yield much fruit. I hope the translation you read reflects this dynamic. When the Lord gives the land gives back. The fruit of the Spirit will be the great harvest.

God walks among us

Finally, when God grants the revival of v.6, God promises to walk among His people. This is thrilling to imagine. "Righteousness will go before

[God] and make his footsteps a way". Things in God's people's lives which are contrary to God's character will not stop His stride. Obstructions will be dealt with by his righteousness. God's changes, in other words, will make a way for God to move freely amongst his people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, allow me to draw out four principles from the teaching of Ps.85.

? **Forgiveness of all sin is found in the crucified Christ.**

WE MUST SEE JESUS when we read vv.1-3 and hear about "you covered all their sin, You withdrew all your wrath". The shadow lands of the Psalms are pointing us to the noonday brightness of the N.T. and Jesus Christ our propitiation. We hear the reality of 1Jn.4:10 in Ps.85:2,3 don't we? "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins". God's wrath removed and God's satisfaction accomplished is a truth beyond words. Enjoy no condemnation in Christ and Christ alone.

? **Losing fervency for God invites discipline from God.**

God is jealous for His people's devotion. He will not stand back when His people stand aloof. He will give us what we need in order for us to give Him what He desires. And that is fervent loyalty As the writer of Heb. said, "The Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons...[He] disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

? **Sweet thoughts of past salvation should prompt current prayers of revitalization.**

Jesus gives us a means by which God restores His people when we have "lost our first love". He says "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first" (cf. Rev.2:4-5). If rejoicing in God is not seen in the present but only witnessed in the past, take this Ps. as a model and first think upon the days when your joy was God. Allow your memories savored to quicken your desire for God this day. Don't settle for

some “cruise control Christianity”. Go hard for God by using sweet thoughts of past salvation for current prayers for revitalization.!

? **God’s propensity is to revive his people.**

God delights far more in the joy of His people restored rather than the groans of His people under discipline. He will keep us under His hand only long enough for us to want His face. Know God’s inclination. Know that He leans toward His people. May Zeph.3:17 awaken our passion for more of God. “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness. He will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing”.