

Repent and Return

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[0 : 00] God, thank you for gathering us this Friday evening so that we could hear from you and speak to you from your word, through your word, and in our prayers.

We pray that you would meet with us and lead us, guide our prayers, and answer them, Lord. Help us to pray according to your will.

And remind us, Lord, of your steadfast love, which is the basis for our salvation. In Psalm 85, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Psalm 85 is a short psalm. It's a subtitle that says, To the Choir Master, a Psalm of the Sons of Korah. So I'll just read it out loud and we'll look into it briefly.

Lord, you are favorable to your land. You restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people.

[1 : 00] You covered all their sins, Selah. You withdrew all your wrath. You turned from your hot anger. Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us.

Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.

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. Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness meet. Righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.

Yes, the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps away. Regret, right, is what we feel when we're sorry for something we've done and wish to turn the clock back, but we are helpless to do so.

[2 : 14] We can't repair it or restore it. But repentance is when we feel sorry for something we have done, but we actually turn back. Right? We seek to restore the wrong we have done.

And unfortunately, all of our lives and as we grow, I think we have more and more regrets. But fortunately, when it comes to the most important thing about life, our relationship with God, there's always a chance for repentance.

And Psalm 85, really the main point, is that we should repent and return to the God who restores us. And in verses 1 to 7, we find an appeal to God's steadfast love.

And then in verses 8 to 13, we find an affirmation of God's steadfast love. So the psalmist is clearly writing from a place of distress and suffering. Because he says, restore us again, O God of our salvation, right, in verse 4.

And he sees this, we can tell from the context, that the psalmist thinks that this suffering is a direct result of God's anger. Right? His indignation with them.

[3 : 18] While this obviously isn't true for all of our suffering and the evil we experience, because we... But some sins really are... I mean, some suffering that we experience really are due to our sins.

So it's like John 5, 14, for example, Jesus tells an invalid that he just healed. He tells him, sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you. Right? Clearly implying that his disability really stemmed from his sin.

But then again, in John 9, 3, same book, Jesus says of a man blind from birth, it was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

Right? So we can't simplistically say that all suffering is a form of divine punishment. But it is true that sin has consequences. And in this case, the psalmist knows that the suffering of his nation was

directly connected to the sins, to their sins against God.

And so even though we don't know the exact setting, historical setting behind this, really the kind of the generic nature of the psalm and the distress that the psalmist is writing from really helps us to apply to all situations and any circumstance and suffering that we may be going through.

[4 : 26] And so Thomas is praying to God, restore us again. And as he does that, what's really helpful is that he doesn't appeal to the nation's worthiness to be saved.

He doesn't appeal to their deservingness, but to God's stephest love. So first, in verses 1 to 3, he starts by remembering, recalling how God delivered them in the past.

Lord, you are favorable to your land. You restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people. You covered all their sin. Selah. You withdrew all your wrath. You turned from your hot anger.

So, you see, this wasn't the first time that Israel had sinned against God. But formerly, when they had sinned against him, God forgave them. He restored them. He covered their sin and turned from his hot anger.

So, based on that past experience, then the psalmist appeals to God's stephest love. And he asks him to save them again in verses 47. Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us.

[5 : 34] Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.

The word restore in verses 1 and 4. And the word turn from in verse 3. And the word revive us again in verse 6. They're all different translations of the same Hebrew word.

And so, they convey the idea of returning and restoring. And so, the psalmist is basically appealing to God's character as described in Psalm 30, verse 5.

For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Though God is presently angry with them, they're appealing to the fact that God's not going to remain angry forever. He's appealing to the fact that God's gracious, that he will turn back again to his people, restore them again.

And it's based on that confidence in God's character that the psalmist now appeals for a deliverance. And this is really helpful because when we sin against God, I don't know how your tendency to respond is to God.

[6 : 40] And sometimes, for me, I can feel like, oh, no, I definitely can't go to God to pray right now. You know, I can't seek his face sometimes, you know, because I need to clean up my act a little bit, you know, before I can go back to him.

You know, or you could feel like, oh, God's definitely unhappy with me right now because, you know, he's probably exasperated. Like, can you sin in the same way? I've told you, confronted you again and again, yet you do it again and again.

And he's fed up with me. You know, that sometimes we could feel that way because, and that's really kind of, then we're expecting our worthiness, really, to be the basis for our appealing to God, right?

First of all, but the psalm teaches that that's not the case, right? It's not too late for God to help us. That God turns back to us not because we deserve it, not because we've cleaned up our act sufficiently, but because of his steadfast love.

And we have been fickle and unfaithful to him, but he is faithful and steadfast in his love toward us. And it's because of his steadfast love that we can turn back to God.

[7 : 45] That's the basis. And so having appealed to God's steadfast love, the psalmist then affirms God's steadfast love in the following verses. He says, 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. So he's expressing the faith, right, that he has to the rest of the worshippers gathered with him, that God will speak peace to his people, to his saints.

And because of God's steadfast love and how he turns back to them again and again out of his steadfast love, it's all the more important that these people not turn back to folly. Again, this is the same word that was repeated before.

So if God restores his people, it would be the height of wickedness and foolishness for them to turn back again from God after he has turned back to them.

And so in verse 9 it says, Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. The word salvation is a key word in this psalm, and it's repeated three times.

[8 : 50] And in verse 4 God's described as the God of our salvation. And verse 7 says, Grant us your salvation. And verse 9 it says, Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him.

And I think these descriptions are helpful because they always associate salvation exclusively and uniquely with God. Salvation belongs to the Lord. There's no one else that can save.

And because God's the one that was basically, whose wrath was incurred through their sin, it's only God who can rescue them and forgive them and pardon them and restore them to peace.

And so because the psalmist expects this, that salvation will come from the Lord, and when the Lord is near to them, his glory will dwell in the land, because glory is really a summary of all of God's attributes.

Then in verses 10 to 11, he unpacks what God's glory consists of. He says, Steadfast love and faithfulness meet. Righteousness and peace kiss each other.

[9 : 55] Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.

These are really the most fundamental attributes of God described in two pairs of words that are in apparent tension with each other.

So steadfast love conveys the idea of being magnanimous and gracious to someone. Even when that love is undeserved or unexpected. It's the idea that's captured by one of our favorite Christian words, right?

Grace. Right? Mercy. But God's not merely gracious and loving. He is also faithful, right? And when we use the word faithful, we usually mean being faithful to someone or something else.

But in Hebrew, it's the same word that means truth. And it's sometimes translated as stability or firmness. And when used of God, it refers to the fact that God is always true to his character.

He's true to himself. So then the question is raised. And the word meet can also mean confront. It's the same word that means that. So it's kind of playing on that polarity.

[10 : 57] And so how can God be both true to his holy character and just standards, and at the same time be gracious to a sinful people? How can God, how can steadfast love and faithfulness meet?

Obviously, there would be no disharmony if we weren't for people to sin. But when the people, his object of love are sinful, how can steadfast love and faithfulness meet? And a similar contrast is seen in the pair of righteousness and peace, right?

Righteousness is often translated as justice and points to the reality that God defines what is right. He is just, and he is the one that executes justice on the earth.

Peace, on the other hand, conveys the idea of right relationship with God and one another and the whole world, right? It doesn't refer to an absence of conflict as such, but to a state of being whole, being made right, and in right order with God and his design for creation.

And there can only be peace, right, in a world that is made right. So when people that he loves are unrighteous, when they are unjust, how can God grant them peace?

[12 : 01] Because there can be no peace when there is no righteousness. And so when will come a day, as it says in verse 11, when righteousness that looks down from heaven will find faithfulness looking back up from the earth?

When will that day come? And these tensions are not ultimately resolved in this psalm, but they point to and are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. Because John 1.14, Apostle John describes the glory of Jesus as the glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The words grace and truth being John's translation, the Greek equivalent of steadfast love and faithfulness. And likewise in Hebrews 7.2, Jesus is described both as the king of righteousness and the king of peace.

In Jesus, the divine attributes of God that are in tension, seemingly because of the sinful people, are fulfilled and fully displayed. And this is because God's steadfast love towards sinners and his faithfulness to his character, for his holiness and justice, they collide on the cross, right?

Where Jesus dies for the sins of his people. Because God's holy, he can't excuse our sins, yet because he's merciful and gracious, he bears the punishment himself instead of punishing us for the sins that we have committed.

[13 : 24] And by dying on the cross and rising again, Jesus makes righteousness and peace, yes. That he makes his steadfast love and truth meet.

And so then for us, in order for us to experience that peace, to have rightly ordered relationship with God, for our lives and our world to be characterized by righteousness, we must cling to Christ and his gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

Because there's salvation in no other name than his name. And when we are in him, then that tension that existed is removed. And now in perfect harmony, steadfast love and faithfulness coexists together.

Let's pray together that that and sing together about that steadfast love and faithfulness of God.