

Psalm 85

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[0 : 00] Now you get to a certain age, and I don't think I'm there yet, when you talk about the good old days. The good old days, people used to say it wasn't my granddad and my dad say it.

My dad still says to me, it wasn't like that in my day. It was better in the past, and maybe you've heard people say that to you. My granddad, you see, could leave your doors open all day. It was totally safe. People were running each other's houses. Everyone was safe. We had a community. People helped each other out. Those were the days. Those were the good old days. My granddad used to tell us, it's kind of a funny story, that I think the amount of money that he used to say got less every time, but the things that he could buy with that amount of money got more every time.

He used to tell me a story like, I used to be able to go out on a Saturday with a shilling. I don't know how much that is. He said I used to go out, I used to be able to go to the football, get the bus there and back, get fish and chips for the family, and still have change for a paper.

Those were the good old days. And maybe you remember stories like that with people who are a bit older. But even if we might not be of that age yet, we do all love to reminisce about our past, don't we?

[1 : 15] We love to reminisce about the past. And maybe we call them the glory days. That's one of the terms that we use for the days of our past.

We reminisce about those moments in life that we would love to replay or watch over, or that we have a certain affinity and we love talking about. I don't know what it's for you.

Maybe it's early in youth, in your early 20s, or you're at university, you've just moved away, or you've graduated, that first holiday abroad. Those days, those were the glory days of youth.

Now, don't get me wrong, we're probably tempted to look at our glory days through slightly rose-tinted glasses. But nevertheless, nevertheless, it's a time that we'd love to relive.

In the Old Testament, at the time the psalm was written, the Israelites experienced something of this. When they looked back to their ancestors, or looked back to the stories that they were told, however, it's slightly different, because there really was a time where it wasn't through rose-tinted glasses.

[2 : 28] There really was a time when the psalm was written where God's people were much more glorious than when the psalmist writes. And it's not just glory, as I'm talking about glory days, as some sort of, you know, when we say that, it's kind of like a metaphor for the brilliant moments that we've remembered in our life.

But when the Israelites think back to their glory days, it was when the true glory, the presence of God, the glory of God was present with His people.

It was right at the heart of Jerusalem, in the temple, God's very presence, His glory present, dwelled with them in the inner sanctuary of the temple. They were Israel's glory days, because the glory of God was present, dwelling with them.

However, when the psalmist, when the psalmist writes this song, those days are long gone. The temple and Jerusalem, along with it, had at that time been destroyed by the Babylonian Empire. Just to give you an idea of geography, Babylon is where modern-day Iraq is. And they'd taken and destroyed Jerusalem. And the glory of God had left the building as such.

[3 : 45] God's people had been taken into captivity, and the presence of the glory of God dwelling with His people was something that only the older members of the community could remember.

Those were the glory days, the good old days. But that's not the end of the story. Those people eventually returned to Israel and rebuild the temple. But here's the catch.

There is a twist. They go back into the land. They rebuild the temple. But the twist is the glory of God. His presence that dwelled in the inner sanctuary of the temple never returns. It never returns. God's presence, His holy presence, His glory, never returns to the temple. Now it's quite hard for any of us today, I think, to understand what that means, that the glory of God dwelling somewhere in a physical way.

It's not where God lived as such, but it is where He was. There was a particular manifestation of where He was present with His people is the best way to think of it. And this is where we're at as we come to this psalm.

[4 : 50] That they've returned to the land, but they're rebuilding, but God's glory doesn't return. It is important sometimes as we approach texts like this to know the context that lies behind.

You know what I mean by that? The situation in which the original people who wrote the song find themselves. Because it helps us to get a grasp of what they're going through, their emotions, their experience, and that helps us to think through this psalm together.

That is our starting point. They want to be restored. They're praying because they want to be restored to their former glory. They want the good old days.

They want the glory days, which is where we start our first point. And so as we come to it, we're going to be thinking about what that means for them and what that means for us. The first thing the psalmist sings about is revive us, or restore us, you could say.

Revive us again as you did in the past. Revive us again as you did in the past. This song, it is a lament. It is a lament to the hell.

[5 : 57] Things are not what they used to be. They're happy to be back in the land on one level, but it's not like it used to be. They've seen God's goodness to them, bringing them out of captivity.

Look with me as we see that in verse 1. You, Lord, showed favor to your land. You restored the fortunes of Jacob.

Jacob just means Israel here. God showed them favor by restoring their fortunes, by returning to the land from captivity. And we know what it means, don't we, if something's restored.

Some of us will remember quite a few years back. Now, it's quite a few years back. I think it's in the 90s. Windsor Castle went up in flames, or even probably more recently, just a few years ago, Notre Dame.

Notre Dame, the work of the craftsmen involved was to restore Windsor Castle to its former glory. Notre Dame now is, I was reading just the other day, is hopefully going to be open to the public within the next year.

[7 : 00] The point of restoration, we know from that illustration, is to be restored to how it used to be. That is the same with God's people.

That is the same with God's people. And there's something even more pertinent with God's people, because the restoration of their land is an indication that they're also blessed by the living God.

But God has forgiven them. Verse 2, he says, the psalmist says to the living God, you forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins.

Verse 3, he's turned aside. He's angry and raw. And if the psalmist finished at the end of verse 3, you would assume, you would assume that everything was hunky-dory, that everything was good. But then we get this change, this change in the tone of the psalm. There is a knowing question that remains for the psalmist. If they're in the land, and they're being forgiven, why is it different?

[8 : 03] Why hasn't the glory of God returned? Why is God not present with his people in the same way? And they pour out their hearts. Verse 6, restore us again.

God our Savior, put away your displeasure towards us. Is he still angry with us? Will he not revive us again? Will you not revive us so that we can rejoice in you?

Come on, Lord, show us your unfailing love. Grant us your salvation. Restoration. You might say that it feels like they've been partially restored, and they want the full restoration.

They want the glory days. They want the former glory. It's like, imagine Notre Dame being reopened in a year's time, but there's no windows, or half the building is still rubble, and the other half is immaculate.

That's what it feels to them. They're in the land, but the glory's not there. Now, we are not the Old Testament people of God, are we? The people of Israel were New Testament believers, the church, and the church, as we know, is not tied to a geographical land.

[9 : 12] It is made up of all nations. However, there are some areas of the world where the church, the people of God, experience an unbelievable amount of blessing.

They're growing at an unprecedented rate, and we give God thanks for that. Yet, I wonder, in Scotland, do we almost look at that and find that hard to believe?

Because in Scotland, as we know over the last 20, 30 years, attendance congregations are shrinking, and it could fail, it could fail to us in the church, that the glory days of Christianity in Scotland have gone.

And just like the Israelites looked for God to restore their nation, it is right for us to desire that God restores the church in our nation.

It's been said before, Scotland used to be known as the land of the book, the land of the Bible. You might look and say, the church, God's people, they're still around, but it doesn't look very glorious to me.

[10 : 28] Do we feel that? I know I feel that. Now, there's lots of reasons to why that's happened, but here, one thing to notice is, here in the psalm, the writer, he doesn't give reasons, he doesn't give reasons in this song to God as to why it has happened.

There's no sort of negativity, he just wants the glory to return. And that's the same with us. Of course, there is a time and a place when we can talk about why the church has gone that way, has the reasons why the glory is, it might feel like things are going on a negative trajectory, and that has its time and place, perhaps realizing mistakes made by the church, and that helps us not repeat them.

But notice, that's not mentioned here. The emphasis is not on what man should have done, but the emphasis is on asking God to do what he can only do.

Asking him to be the orchestrator of restoring his own glory. That is what we need. That is what we need. As individuals, and as a corporate body, a people, we need God.

And we need him to hear us, and to answer us, and to renew us, because we rely on him alone to do it. The restoration of God's people in the land comes from God.

[11 : 52] The restoration of the church in Scotland comes from God, and we are at his mercy. We can't do it. It is down to him, and so we plead, and we lament with the saints, restore us.

Revive us. Renew us. Again, as you have done in the past, we've seen, we've seen you bless this church in this land.

We can read lots about it. So we know you can do it. Do it again, Lord. Restore us. Restore your people. Show us your salvation that we might rejoice in you.

So that's the first thing. Second thing the psalmist says, second point, I will listen to what God the Lord says.

I will listen to what God the Lord says. Having said all that, it is all down to God. The signs of restoration, of renewal, of revival, they come in God's people, and what the psalmist says is that the signs of it, they're seen in God's people themselves.

[13 : 09] After lamenting about the state that God's people, that they find themselves in, the glory's gone, the psalmist sings of how God works in their hearts to bring about that glory in the land.

Because he, what the psalmist is saying is that the glory of God is there when God's people listen to him and believe his promises. Just look with me, verse 8.

I will listen to what God the Lord says. He promises peace to his people, his faithful servants, but let them not turn to folly. Surely, his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

You see what he's singing? He's saying, God promises peace to his people. And when those promises are listened to and believed in by his people, that God promises peace and reconciliation to the faithful, when he's taken at his word, when he's taken at his word, it is a demonstration that he is there and that he is at work in them already.

And in response to the promises he makes, there is a faithful, obedient living from his people. If that is sin, then surely the psalmist sings.

[14 : 33] Surely. Surely, when that is witnessed in the community of the saints, then salvation is near. Then it's at hand that glory is right there dwelling with the people, in the people.

Surely that's true. Surely that's true. And I think, halfway through the psalm, that the psalmist realizes something. That the physical, the physical presence of the glory of God may not have returned, but nevertheless, nevertheless, there are people that believe his promises, listen to what

he says, take him at his word, and live in accordance with it.

Because God is glorified, God is glorified, when the people of God respond to the word of God with repentance and faith, believing in his promises. When God's people say together, I will listen, I will listen to what God the Lord says, there is glory there.

Taking people at their word, I don't know if you've dealt with sort of old school laborers. Old school laborers tend to not do contracts when sorting out a job.

We've had dealings with some recently, and they just sort of, they say, they don't do contracts, but they give you their word. In today's world, I don't know that, maybe you'd feel slightly uncomfortable with that sort of business arrangement, but in days gone by, if somebody gave you their word, it was as good as binding.

[16:09] This is what God wants us to do, and it's what the psalmist chooses to do, to take God at his word. I will listen to what God the Lord says. And just like Israel looked at their restoration effort, like, they would have felt discouraged.

There is temptation for them, and for us, to read what God says at his word, and see, well, where is it then? We might look at the church in Scotland and feel the same way that the Israelites felt.

We live in a different time. The culture has shifted. What is God doing? Why are church attendances dying? Why have some churches tried to fit with the culture and sacrifice the gospel? We don't have all the answers, but despite all that being true, we will say together, I will listen to what the Lord says. I will take him at his word. I will trust and believe in him, and live according to it. And if you're here this morning, and the things of Christianity are perhaps new to you, or looking into the claims, you're still looking into the claims of the church that Jesus makes, this is what we believe as Christians.

[17:24] We believe that when God makes promises that he keeps them, and that he has promised to all people, no matter what background or what you've done, that if you turn to him, if you turn to Jesus Christ and ask him into your life to help you, to save you, then the God who made that promise to you will give you a future of hope, of peace, of reconciliation, of forgiveness.

He will give you purpose in your life where it feels empty. He'll accept you unconditionally to love you. Imagine that, loving you with no conditions ever attached. There's no hidden small print in the promises of God.

It does sound good to be true, but there's no catch. He'll accept you as you are, but let change you day to day to be the best, most holy version of you. And we take him at his words that he will do this.

The gospel of Jesus Christ are promises to you, to us, that are enacted and brought into fulfillment through his life, death, and resurrection because he died to take away your guilt and your shame.

Your guilt and your shame died at the cross with Jesus, and then he was raised to new life to destroy sin, death, and all evil. And he will never go back on his promise. We take him at his word.

[18:37] We will listen to what God the Lord says. We will listen to what God the Lord says. Which brings us this amazing picture of God that we get in the last few verses.

It's an amazing picture. As people, as is quite obvious, we're very different to God.

We're only able to show one character trait at a time, one emotional response at a time. That's because we change. And we change when our circumstances change.

You'll know this if you've ever experienced if someone cuts you up on the road, on the roundabout, you get angry. Now, if you're normally a peaceful, relaxed kind of a person, in that moment when someone does that to you on the road and you feel intense rage, you are anything but relaxed and peaceful.

And that's because we change. Our emotional responses change. We can't be peaceful and angry in the same moment. Our emotional responses, they change in line with our circumstances and it affects how we respond.

[19:53] I don't need you. I can change ten times in an hour. Angry, happy, worried, sad. With each emotion, with each feeling, we change. But in these few verses we get this beautiful picture of God that reminds us that he is unchanging.

That circumstances do not alter him. He's not up and down. He doesn't feel low. He doesn't actually respond to anything based on his emotions. He's always the same.

And he's always consistent with who he is. And we see that poetically with how the psalmist describes his character traits. Just look at me, verse 10.

Love and faithfulness meet together. Righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth and righteousness looks down from heaven.

Towards righteousness, justice, peace and love are different things. But in God we read they kiss, they meet. They're not two sides of God like God has an angry side and a happy side. But who he is is woven together with all his attributes, his character traits, if you like, singing in perfect union with all that he is.

[21 : 08] The psalmist, the reason the psalmist does this, the reason he moves to this poetic description of God is he's explaining that this is the reason we can trust in his promises.

this is actually the reason we can take him at his word. The reason we can take him at his word is because of who he is. It's because of his character traits and it's because he doesn't change.

Now, the issue, I think, the issue in our hearts is that there is no one else like this. There is no one else like this. We sometimes think that God is just a bigger version of us and he's not.

And people will never be able to be like this. People will let you down and you'll let other people down. Because we change and circumstances change us and there are times when we react unexpectedly and we go back on our words.

but it's because, it's because of who our God is, his character, that he doesn't change. That's the reason we can take him at his word. The psalmist is declaring in song, in song, whether God's visible glory is in the temple, whether it's there or not, that God will always act according to who he is.

[22 : 31] He will always be full of peace, of love, of righteous anger, of faithfulness, of mercy and grace, all the time. At the same time, his promises remain.

We can take him at his word. He doesn't change. And ultimately, ultimately, we see this played out, God being faithful to his promises, hearing their prayer and answering it, by sending his own son, Jesus Christ.

Because this is actually how the prayer is truly answered. And do you see how beautiful it makes this psalm, this prayer? That the coming of Jesus is in response to them praying this 400 years before.

They prayed a prayer and sung a prayer and 400 years later God answered their prayer because the glory returns in a person. The glory returns to the land.

They want the glory there. And it does, it comes, but it comes in a way they didn't expect because the glory of God comes down. Jesus Christ is the glory of God. John 1.14, the word, that's Jesus, the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

[23 : 43] We have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only son who came from the father full of grace and truth. The glory really does dwell in the land once more in the person of God's son.

When God's people say 400 years before, when they ask God, shows your unfailing love and grant us your salvation, he shows them his never-ending unfailing love because he sends his son.

He sends his son to die in their place. Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. Shows your love, Lord. Shows your glory.

Here's my son. Here's my son sent to purchase your freedom. What do we see in the life of Jesus? All the qualities in the sound. Full of peace, of love, of righteous anger, of faithfulness, of mercy and grace, all of the time. As followers of Jesus, as followers of Jesus, we can sing this song knowing that the answer to true renewal and revival of our own souls and of the church, the church-wide in Scotland and globally, comes from the true glory.

[25 : 01] It comes from Jesus Christ taking him at his word because he kept his. He gives what is good and our land, the church, will yield its harvest. This is what Jesus wants us to trust today.

This is what Jesus offers us. And we're part of the church. So not only does it he want to restore the church as a body, but he wants to restore us as individuals too.

He wants you to be renewed and restored and revived. Not to the glory days of your past, but he wants to give you something better. He wants you to give you new life, new life connected to him to take away all your mess, to revive you, to give you purpose, direction, fulfillment, peace, joy, and hope in the middle of your struggles.

This is what God promises to do for each one of us today. He promises to do it for his church and he promises to do it for each one of us. We take him at his word.

I will trust, we will trust in what God the Lord says. And so as we come in for landing, let this psalm and let this song be our song and our prayer.

[26 : 21] Do you long for the church in Scotland to be revived and restored? Do you want your own life to be restored and revived spiritually? Take Jesus at his word.

He keeps his promises. He will build his church and he will glorify his name through you. The ministry of the church, the ministry that he does through you, he continues.

It is the ministry of Jesus that he's doing through his people to build his church, to renew us, to renew us as a people. We will take him at his word.

Let's pray together. Almighty God, we do praise you and we do want to sing that song. We do look at the state of Christianity within our nation and we're tempted to be discouraged.

And sometimes we are. But Lord, we know that the glory of the Lord we see in your Son who you sent to live a perfect life, to die in our place and to be raised to new life.

[27 : 23] life. And now you have given us the glory in the church. You've put your spirit in us. And so we ask, Lord Jesus, that you would revive the church in Scotland.

We pray that you'd revive us. And we pray that you'd lift our hearts, give us a zeal for the name of the Lord. We pray that we take joy in worshipping you, in serving you, and that you would use us to be a blessing to those we know, to those in our communities, our families.

We ask, Lord Jesus, that you would revive and restore this church for your glory. That we would trust and take you at your word.

That we would listen and be a people that listen to what the Lord says, that believes and trusts in his promises. We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.