

Rise and Shine

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What we're going to do tonight is we're going to turn to Psalm 80 and we'll just continue with another Psalm. Eighty is a nice round number, a bit of a milestone, I can't believe that we've gotten through 80 and I can't believe we've got 70 more to go, but this is a wonderful Psalm and the title of that tonight if you're taking notes, the title that I've assigned for this is "Rise and Shine." Rise and shine and we're going to just read Psalm 80 before we begin our exposition of it.

Psalm 80, beginning at verse 1,

1 Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who are enthroned above the cherubim, shine forth! 2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your power And come to save us! 3 O God, restore us And cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved. 4 O LORD God of hosts, How long will You be angry with the prayer of Your people? 5 You have fed them with the bread of tears, And You have made them to drink tears in large measure. 6 You make us an object of contention to our neighbors, And our enemies laugh among themselves. 7 O God of hosts, restore us And cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved. 8 You removed a vine from Egypt; You drove out the nations and planted it. 9 You cleared the ground before it, And it took deep root and filled the land. 10 The mountains were covered with its shadow, And the cedars of God with its boughs. 11 It was sending out its branches to the sea And its shoots to the River. 12 Why have You broken down its hedges, So that all who pass that way pick its fruit? 13 A boar from the forest eats it away And whatever moves in the field feeds on it. 14 O God of hosts, turn again now, we beseech You; Look down from heaven and see, and take care of this vine, 15 Even the shoot which Your right hand has planted, And on the son whom You have strengthened for Yourself. 16 It is burned with fire, it is cut down; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance. 17 Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself. 18 Then we shall not turn back from You; Revive us, and we will call upon Your name. 19 O LORD God of hosts, restore us; Cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved.

Let's bow together and open in prayer as we come to God's word here this evening.

Our Lord Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd of the sheep and as we read this Psalm, as we teach this Psalm that is addressed to the Shepherd of Israel, we pray that you would come near to protect us, to provide for us, to guide us through your word that you would be the fullness to us that a shepherd is to a flock of sheep. Be like that to us and in this time, Father, draw us near to the throne of grace. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, if you've lived long enough, there comes a time where you start to realize that life has its ups and downs and you go through times even in your spiritual life where there were heights and now you're kind of grinding it out in the valley, for whatever reason that that may be, and if you've been like that and you can look back in times and you look back and you saw that you were in a better time, in a better place, things were better, life was easier, the Lord seemed closer than he does right now, this is a Psalm that you will be able to relate to because the psalmist here in Psalm 80 is lamenting the nation's fall from its prior heights and he is appealing to God to have mercy on them in their lowness, in their valley, in their difficulty, to have mercy on them, and he is remembering, he is looking back at times gone by and saying, "Bring us back to where we used to be. We're down low. Remember how we used to be lifted up high? Take us there, God, in your dealings with us." And I just want you to see this seam because it's kind of a refrain, kind of a chorus in the Psalm. Look at verse 3, he says, "O God, restore us And cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved." In verse 7 he says, "O God of hosts, restore us And cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved." Then the concluding verse of Psalm 80, verse 19, "O LORD God of hosts, restore us; Cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved."

So you see this course that is repeated multiple times and you also see that key word "restore us," indicating, "Bring us back to to where we used to be. I want to go back to where you once had us, O God." And this word "restore" is a term that can refer to a return to physical prosperity for sure, but it is also a term that can speak of spiritual repentance and spiritual obedience. "Lord, not only bring us back to a place of material well-being, take us back to that place where the spiritual waters were fresh in our souls, where the waters were flowing freely and we were an obedient people, and we were loving and worshiping you in the way that we were appointed to do."

So if you're here this evening in a place where you have slipped perhaps, or have a sense of being distant from where you used to be spiritually, this is a great Psalm to come to grips with here this evening, and here in this Psalm, the psalmist makes over three different paragraphs, he makes a threefold request to God in the Psalm and we'll just walk through those one by one in keeping with the three courses that we saw, we see three sections to this Psalm emphasizing different aspects of the nature of his prayer. And one of the things that I like to say multiple times in different ways as we go through these Psalms, is we're going through them in an intentional way and we are treating one Psalm with one message. It would be easy to go in such a way that you spend three or four messages on each individual Psalm, not only will I not live long enough to do just that the

way that I might like to, what we want to do with these individuals Psalms is we want to see the flow of the Psalm, to see them as a unit of thought and the different aspects of the single unit of thought that is there, and sometimes if you go too slowly through a unit of Scripture like that, you start to miss the big picture, you start to miss what is actually being said because as the psalmist was writing this, he had a comprehensive approach to his Psalm in mind and he was going from point A, to point B, to point C, in order to accomplish an objective with the Psalm which you might miss if you don't see it in its full context and view all of the verses together. So that's what we're trying to do with this entire exposition of the Psalms. Lord willing we'll go through all 150. It's certainly what we want to do tonight.

So we see, first of all, we can put it this way, he opens this Psalm with a section that we'll say, he's asking God to release his care, and by the word "release" I mean show forth your care; let it go; let it out; let it be upon us; release it to us because you've been holding it back until now. Psalm 80 is a prayer for God's help in a time of national distress in the nation.

Look at it in verse 1, he says,

1 Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who are enthroned above the cherubim, shine forth! 2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your power And come to save us!

He refers to the full nation of Israel and then starts to identify specific tribes as well so that you see this is not a prayer about individual circumstance, this is addressing a national situation, a wide matter of concern for the people of God here. This isn't the psalmist dealing with difficulty in his own soul, he's praying on behalf of all of the people of God as they existed at that time and he's appealing to God as the Shepherd of Israel. Look at it there in verse 1, he says, "Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel." "Listen to me. Answer me," in other words, "don't let my words be in vain but hear and respond to what I have to say to you in this prayer."

And I love the fact, we pointed this out last time, I love the fact how he addresses God as the Shepherd of Israel, the shepherd and sheep being a common metaphor in Scripture, being a common aspect of daily life in the nation of Israel in that day; the shepherd being the one who moved about the sheep, who led them from place to place that they would be properly fed. Speaking now of a literal shepherd and literal sheep, that they would be properly fed, properly watered, and moving them about from place to place so that they would always find pasture and what they needed would be provided for them based on the wisdom, the love and the care of that shepherd for the flock of the sheep. So when Scripture refers to God using that metaphor, saying, "God, you are like a Shepherd to us. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," Psalm 23, it's referring to God in a multiple aspected way, he's saying, "God, you are the God who provides for your people. You are the God who leads your people. You are the God who protects your people." You remember that a shepherd would protect his flock from wild animals that would come and attack them. So he's appealing to God in the sense of, "God, you are the one who

cares for us. You are the one, and it's not just that you have an emotional sentiment toward us, you physically provide for us. You actually provide what we need as a people." And it's in that sense that he is appealing to God as the Shepherd.

As I pointed out last time in this section of the Psalter, this theme of God as the Shepherd is prominent and I want you to just see this. We alluded to it last time but I want you to see it for sure here. In Psalm 77, this is the fourth consecutive Psalm where some kind of an allusion to God as the Shepherd and the people as a flock is made. In Psalm 77:20 it concludes with the statement, speaking to God, "You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron." In Psalm 78, the last two verses of that very long Psalm, the second longest Psalm in the Psalter behind Psalm 119, in Psalm 78:71 and 72 it says, "From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him To shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them with his skillful hands." Here an allusion to David, you see the theme of shepherd being manifested in the writings of the Psalms in this section. Then in Psalm 79:13 addressing the prayer to God, it says, "So we Your people and the sheep of Your pasture Will give thanks to You forever; To all generations we will tell of Your praise." And as you continue reading right through the next verse, it picks up in Psalm 80, "Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock." So as you are reading this Psalm and as you are reading it in the way that it has been handed down to us, skillfully arranged by whoever did it, perhaps Ezra arranging the Psalm toward the end of the close of the Old Testament canon, it is obviously grouped together to bring this theme of a shepherd and elevate it into our thinking.

So here he is appealing to the Shepherd. "You are the one who provides for us. You are the one who protects us. You are the one who leads us." So now what I want you to see with all of that is that this is the opening way that the Psalm is framed. He has opened his Psalm with a powerful and a potent appeal to God based on God's caring closeness. Everything that follows in this Psalm, all of the requests that are made, all of the appeals that are made are in the context of saying, "God, you deal with us as though you were our Shepherd. That's how close you are. That's how much you care for us as your people. So it's on that basis that I appeal to you."

One of the things that you see as you read through the Psalms, as you read through the Scriptures again and again, is that theology matters; that knowing God matters. Christian, when you speak to God, you speak to him not as though he were some distant deity, you speak to him not as someone that is remote and unknown as the people in the book of Acts did, they had a monument "to the unknown god," praying to someone that they had no idea who he was. What you should remember as one redeemed by the blood of Christ, as one whom Christ has made one of his own sheep, one whom Christ has brought near, you should remember and know and understand who the God is that has saved you and to realize that Christ has purchased a full and free access to God for you, that he did that at a loving impulse that he himself initiated so that when we go to God in a time of need, when we go to him through and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are going to him on the basis that he has first loved us. "God, I come to you in my time of desperation, I come to you in this time of great need based on the way that you yourself have decided to

do with me. You have dealt with me in love. You have dealt with me as a Shepherd and, therefore, it is proper for me to appeal to you to care for me in my time of crisis, in my time of need, in my time of chronic discouragement. Lord, because of what you have done, it is perfectly appropriate for me not only to ask you for your help but to expect you to help me because of who you have chosen to be to me. When you saved me, Lord, you entered into covenant with me. You brought me into a realm of promises that you promised to do certain things for me and I appeal to you on that basis."

So to know God, to know the way that he deals with his people puts us in a position of great strength, of great confidence, of great security, and you as a Christian just as my brother Jeff yesterday; you do not go through a sudden crisis in the dark when calamity suddenly falls upon you; you're not cast out to see having no idea what to do. No. No, not at all. Not at all. You turn your heart to this God that you've come to know, this God who has made himself known in the Scriptures and you say, "God, even though this circumstance is like a flash-flood tsunami to me, I know where to go. I know who to call out to. I trust you. I ask you to help me in the midst of this. I cling to my Rock. I look to the Lighthouse that is unmovable in the midst of this." And that's why I'm so encouraged for those of you that are here so faithfully week after week after week, because I know what the Spirit of God is doing in your heart as you believingly and receptively listen to the word of God. He is building into you the principles, the convictions, the affections that will serve you, that will come to your aid in that time of crisis just like it did for Jeff yesterday.

I have five girls, as you all know, one son who had shoulder surgery today and is recovering well. One of the things that I said to my kids as they were moving into the later teenage years and taking responsibility for their own vehicles, and Dave, this is an illustration made to order for you and I know you'll affirm it. You check with Dave and see if he doesn't affirm everything that I'm about to say right here. It can't be too deep because I don't work well with cars or with my hands, not that that has anything to do with it. But one of the things, this is actually leading to an important spiritual point so stay with me. "I don't know, Martha, I think he's rambling. I think he's lost it tonight." I haven't lost it. I haven't lost it. I know right where this is going. One of the things that we've said to our kids all the time talking about maintaining their car, taking care of the routine maintenance and all of that, the oil changes and tire pressure and all that, we've said to them, "You take care of your car and your car will take care of you. If you take care to make sure that your car has what it needs, it will serve you and will be much less likely to break down on you and strand you in a rainstorm or a snowstorm or beside a dark road in the middle of the night. Take care of things in advance so that your car won't strand you compared to what it would be like if you just ignored all of those things."

So we've said those things to our kids over and over again. What does that have to do with tonight? Perfectly understandable here as I'm going to make plain. What you are doing by coming week after week on Tuesday evenings and being here so faithfully on Sundays as well, here's the way it works: you take care of paying attention to the word of God when you have the opportunity, being faithful even though it may not seem like there's anything really special happening necessarily week by week, you take care of the

word and when tragedy strikes, when trials come, when calamity hits, here's what you'll find, you'll find that the word takes care of you. You take care of the word faithfully over time when there doesn't seem to be any crisis going on which is what all of you are doing and I love you for it, what you're going to find I have no doubt in my mind is you're going to find when life strikes hard at you, you're going to find that the word takes care of you; that the word is your strength; that the word is your comfort because the word is pointing you to the one who loved you first. It's going to point you to Christ and you're going to be able to rest in the love of Christ even though it seems like the walls of life are crumbling down around you. This is important and I rejoice over what the Lord does on behalf of those who give such careful faithful attention to his word like all of you do because every one of you almost is here almost every week that you can be, and you are getting a benefit out of the life of the body that some others may not get the full benefit of. Let's just leave it there.

Well, coming back to Psalm 80 now, the whole point of all of that is that the psalmist is appealing to God and his knowledge of God, which is informed by the word of God. We are in a like position as we draw near to God in his word and we can appeal to him as our Shepherd and that's what he's doing here in verses 1 and 2.

Look at verse 2 with me, he says,

2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your power And
come to save us!

Now Joseph and Benjamin are shorthand references to the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel, Israel the northern kingdom, Judah the southern kingdom after the division of the kingdom after the reign of Solomon. Ephraim and Manasseh were Joseph's sons and there's something very interesting, we won't take the time to turn back there but in Numbers 2, it talks about the position of the tribes around the ark of the covenant as they moved forward in their wilderness wanderings. When the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night would move forward, the tribes had an order that they followed in order to move forward and to follow the leading of God. Well, these three tribes that are mentioned here in verse 2, Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, in Numbers 2 beginning in verse 17, these three tribes marched directly behind the ark of the covenant and the Levitical priests so that the picture is this back in Numbers 2, the ark and the priests go forward and then the nation follows the leading of God, and these three tribes were directly behind the manifestation of the presence of God in the ark of the covenant. What he's doing here by invoking those three names is he saying this, it's a powerful prayer, he's saying, "God, I am asking you to lead our people like you did in the past. When you were powerfully leading us through the wilderness going forward before us and your presence was manifested and we were going forward after you, I want you to lead us in that same way as you did in the past. Make your presence known. Make it felt and help us to follow you as we did in those days. Restore the tribes to their old position. Unite us and lead us. Restore us." Remember the prayer of restoration, verse 3, look at it with me again, "O God restore us. Take us back. Deal with us now as you dealt with us in the past and cause your face to shine upon us."

Beloved, the practical application of this is far clearer and far more potent than you might realize. He's appealing to God as a shepherd and saying, "God, this is the role that you actually have toward us and you have manifested the power of that role in the past. You've done this in the past. This is who you are to us now. I'm asking you, therefore, to do for us now what you did in the past." And how does that help us to think through the nature of being a Christian here today? How does it help us in our trials is to remember this: you start by doing what we're doing tonight, doing what you're doing tonight, while there is a peaceful opportunity in your life, when you have a clarity of mind, to anchor your mind in the truths of Scripture that have been revealed; to know who God is; to know him as your Rock; to know him as your Fortress; to know him as your Shepherd; to know him in the Lord Jesus Christ; to know him as the Shepherd of the indwelling Holy Spirit; and to come to know all of those things and to incorporate those and to believe those and to understand them then when things start to fall apart seemingly in your circumstances, you're able to lean back on that and say, "God, you haven't changed. Your role to me is the same now that it was before and so from that position of strength, I'm asking you to help me."

Now he says to God, he says, "God, this is what you were like. This is who you are. What you've done before, I'm asking you to do again. I'm asking you to do it now." Do you see the power of the appeal? "God, I'm only asking you to do according to who you have made yourself to be to me. When I come to you praying urgently about the needs of the flock of Truth Community Church or come to you urgently praying for the needs of persons in my life or for my own needs, God, I am only asking you to do what you already determined to be. I don't have to persuade you to do something other than who you are. I'm appealing to you to be what you have made yourself to be to me." That is a potent way to pray.

So what is it that he's concerned about here? Look at the end of verse 2, he says, "stir up Your power And come to save us!" It's quite possible that this Psalm was written as the nation of Assyria was bearing down on the northern kingdom threatening to carry them into captivity. So the psalmist appeals to God to provide the Shepherd's care. Look at verse 3, he says,

3 O God, restore us And cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved.

Using that term in a broader sense of deliverance, not in the way that we often think about saved and being a spiritual salvation from sin, he's talking about using it in the sense of deliverance, "Deliver us." And what did God do in the past? Look at verse 3, "And cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be safe." What had God done in Egypt? He had displayed his glory. He had led them powerfully in the pillars of cloud and fire. In other words, beloved, God had appeared to them in his glory and majesty to protect and lead them in the past, and what he's saying now is, "God, appear again in your glory and in your majesty to help us. This idea of causing your face to shine upon us, it's like a smile of favor." You know what that's like when you meet a friend, when you meet

a loved one, maybe you haven't seen them for a while and their face beams at you and you realize that you are in the presence of one who loves you, who cares for you, where you are welcome. Their face is shining upon you. You understand that. It's a smile of favor. When he says, "God, shine upon us. Have your face shine upon us," he's saying, "Look on us with favor in the midst of our distress." It echoes the benediction from Numbers 6 that we often read to close a service. "The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace."

So in this section of these first three verses he's saying, "God, pour out your care upon us. Let it out. Release your care to us because we are in a time of need." Now, why is he making that request? What's the context in which he prays? This request to "release your care" is urgent because, and it's striking, you don't expect this so much when you realize what the basis on which he is praying, where it goes beginning in verse 4 is surprising and it's the second section for this evening. This second aspect of his prayer is, "God, relent from your anger." Relent from your anger, and as we go into this section, we find that the psalmist is praying at a time when God's chosen people are under a time of discipline. They are under a time of discipline and he makes this very clear and direct beginning in verse 4. He says,

4 O LORD God of hosts, How long will You be angry with the prayer of
Your people? 5 You have fed them with the bread of tears, And You have
made them to drink tears in large measure.

Now you're not expecting this, you're not expecting verse 4 after the kind of introduction that you've seen in verse 3. There is quite a contrast here between this appeal to God as the Shepherd and suddenly he goes right into saying, "God, relent from your anger upon us. How long are you going to be angry with us?" And the original language is especially vivid, it pictures God as smoking hot in anger even while they are praying to him. "God, even as we're praying to you, you're smoking in anger and, God, this is in the context of you being our Shepherd. Don't do this. Have mercy on us. Turn from your anger and show mercy and compassion upon us." And they are in this time of sorrow.

Look at verse 5, they are in a time of sorrow, "You have fed them with the bread of tears, And You have made them to drink tears in large measure." They had been so full of weeping, there had been such devastation of heart amongst the people in this time that it is as though God were force-feeding them tears for their daily meals. They are choking on tears. They are choking on sorrow. They are suffocating, may be better stated. They are drowning in tears as this Psalm is being written. So this Psalm, you start to see, is a cry for mercy and it's a cry for God to change the way that he is manifesting his dealings with them. "Change your disposition toward us. God, here I am in the midst of the suffering, we're in this time of judgment. God, you are our Shepherd. God, remember that you care for us. God, because of who you are, show mercy to us. Enough, O God! You've done enough. We get the point. Turn away from the judgment. Turn away from your anger and show the kind of mercy that is fitting for a shepherd to show to his flock."

And there's not simply a vertical dimension to his sorrow, there is a horizontal aspect to it as well. Look at verse 6, he says,

6 You make us an object of contention to our neighbors, And our enemies
laugh among themselves.

He says, "Lord, this is utterly intolerable. Not only are we filled with sorrow, in the midst of our sorrow the surrounding nations are laughing at us. We are a mockery amongst other people. Here we are supposed to be the chosen people and here we are in the midst of such a calamity and our sorrow is unabated and it seems like, Lord, you're sitting on the sidelines. You, our Shepherd, are sitting on the sidelines, how can this be, God? I appeal to you to remember who you are. You are our Shepherd." Seventy-seven, 78, 79, 80, this has been a constant theme through this section of the Psalter and so he prays, "God, help us. God, have mercy on us." And you see the refrain, you see the chorus there again in verse 7,

7 O God of hosts, restore us And cause Your face to shine upon us, and we
will be saved.

So not only are the themes and the cognitive thinking of this Psalm impressive, as a piece of poetry it is impressive as well as he repeats his course and you see the emphasis of what he is saying as he repeats the chorus again and again at the end of each section of this Psalm. "God, restore us. God, cause your face to shine upon us. God, we have been brought low. God, show favor to us." And you start to see how this kind of praying would be very much something to appropriate in our day and age. Are you a parent struggling with a difficult child? "God, we've been dealing with this for so long. Have mercy on us. God, show favor to us. I weep over the sorrow that this one has brought to me, God, won't you show favor, won't you have your face to shine upon us, shine upon me in this role as I watch this one struggle and seem to rebel more and more against you? God, show favor to me. I'm eating tears here, God. Have mercy on me."

I said to someone recently, I don't remember who it is as I stand here, but just that sense that I believe that God has a special measure of receptivity to the prayers of a brokenhearted mother. So you mothers, don't give up on praying for those wayward ones of yours. Come and look at Psalm 80. Here they are force-fed on tears, times of mockery all about them. It seems like God is angry with them and what does he do? He appeals to God as his Shepherd and he says, "God, restore us. God, cause your face to shine upon us. Show me favor. God, this is beyond my control. I cannot make this happen. I cannot turn that person's heart. God, have mercy on me that is in keeping with the role that you have established with me as my Shepherd."

As he continues on in the prayer, his appeal becomes even more urgent in light of their storied past. When I say storied, their lofty history that the nation had before this time of discipline at the hand of God. So he said, "God, release your care. God, relent from your anger. Cause your face to shine upon us." Now in this third section, the prayer is, "Remember your vine." Remember your vine, and we pick up the Psalm in verse 8 now,

and what he does at this point, what the psalmist does at this point is he gives an extended metaphor, he gives an extended word picture describing Israel as a vine, as God's vine, and let's look at verses 8 through 11. Let's read them together and kind of get that out on the table here this evening. Psalm 80:8,

8 You removed a vine from Egypt; You drove out the nations and planted it. 9 You cleared the ground before it, And it took deep root and filled the land. 10 The mountains were covered with its shadow, And the cedars of God with its boughs. 11 It was sending out its branches to the sea And its shoots to the River.

Now, as you read this, what is the psalmist doing here? He's looking back to the time when God delivered his people out of Egypt from slavery, and this has been another repeated theme in these Psalms that we've looked at over the past several weeks. He's using a metaphor, he's using poetry, he's using a picture to describe what God did. Rather than simply saying, "God, you delivered us out of slavery from Egypt," he uses a picture to make a poetic thought, to create a beautiful word picture in the mind of those who would read and echo this prayer later. He says, "God, it's like you transplanted a vine and we were your vine. You came and you lifted this vine up out of Egypt and you moved it over and you planted it in a new place." So he's looking back to when God delivered his people from Egypt and established them in the land.

Verse 9, he said, "You cleared the ground before it," meaning that, "You drove the nations out before us." In the book of Joshua, you read about that and so it's really amazing how often Scripture does this, in a single verse it will give you a summary of decades or sometimes even centuries of Israeli history in what it says, but he just makes the summary statement, "You cleared the ground before it. You took us as a people out of Egypt, you moved nations out and planted us in the Promised Land," is what he's saying here. Under Joshua, they defeated nations and drove them out. Under David and Solomon, they flourished and they expanded and they took possession of the Promised Land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates River. You can read about that in 1 Kings 4.

But now after that brief look back, now God has removed the protective hedges around his vine. Now he has exposed his vine in a way that it is no longer protected. There is no longer a wall of protections so this vine can flourish, something else is taking place. Verse 12, look at it with me. He says,

12 Why have You broken down its hedges, So that all who pass that way pick its fruit? 13 A boar from the forest eats it away And whatever moves in the field feeds on it.

Now remember, beloved, he's using a metaphor here, he's using an illustration, he's using a word picture here. He's painting a picture not talking about literal animals, he's talking about the way that God has dealt with his people as a nation and he says, "God, look back over the centuries, look back 200-300 years ago when we were flourishing under the

reign of David. Look back before that when you delivered us from Egypt. We were like a vine that you planted so that you would have fruit from it, so that that fruit would belong to you," he is saying, "and now, God, look at the way that it is. The way that things are now have no semblance of contour to what you prepared us to be. Now instead of us flourishing and being a people devoted to giving fruit of praise to you and serving you, now instead we are vulnerable to foreign nations. We are being invaded. We are in danger here and the animals picture the intrusion into Israel from outside foreign armies and foreign nations, and they are taking advantage of us and they are killing our people and they are using our land to their own benefit, and everything that you did to establish us as your vine, O God, is now being taken away."

This metaphor of a vine is frequently used elsewhere in Scripture. In Isaiah 5, in Jeremiah 2, in Jeremiah 12, we won't take time to go there, we just see the point. He is calling the nation, "God, we are your vine." He's kind of changed the metaphor, hasn't he? He's talking about God as a shepherd and talking about Israel as a flock, now it's God is the vinedresser and Israel as his vine, and he's saying, "God, the whole reason," the depth of emotion here, the depth of understanding is staggering, it's wonderful, he's looking back and reminding God of the very purpose for which he did what he did over the centuries in this nation and he says, "God, the very purpose for which you raised us up as a nation is not being fulfilled. Your purpose, O God, is not being fulfilled in what is happening here. God, isn't that grounds for you to act? Isn't that grounds for you to show mercy? For your own name's sake, God, for the sake of your own purpose, God, act. This isn't even in your interests for us to be like that." So he's appealing to God to act for his own glory in what he's saying here.

Now, look at verse 13 again. This is a tangent but it's a really really cool tangent. In verse 13 he says, "A boar from the forest eats it away And whatever moves in the field feeds on it." I actually want you to literally put your finger under the word "forest." Put your finger right by there so that you remember this moment because this is really interesting, this is really cool. You would have no way of knowing this unless I told you this. The Hebrew word for "forest" there and I've got a picture of this on my phone; I can show it to you if you want to see it afterwards. One of the letters in that Hebrew word that's translated "forest" is printed above all the other letters in that word on that line. One of those letters stands above and it's printed above the rest of the line, obviously calling attention to it in some way or another. It's very easy to see. You don't have to understand Hebrew in order to see the printing dynamic of it. Now this is cool. Ancient rabbis identified that specific letter as being the middle letter of all of the letters to all of the words in the entire Psalter. In other words, this is the Continental Divide of the Psalter, of the Hebrew Psalter where 50% of the other letters came before, now 50% of the other letters come after, and what the rabbis did is they counted letters. The level of detail that they gave to the word of God surpasses anything that we know in our age. They counted letters as they were copying to ensure accuracy in the text so that as the text was copied and transmitted, one of the ways that they verified the accuracy of their work was that they counted the letters to make sure that the number of letters were equivalent from the original to the copy that they had made.

Now, I invite you, if you want, if any of you over the next week or two, if you want to count letters in the English Bible, it wouldn't be the same and you might not come out in exactly the same place because of different words translated and different things, but can you imagine going through 150 Psalms and counting the letters and saying this one is the middle one? That is the level of devotion that the ancient rabbis gave to getting the word of God right. It puts us all to shame. It puts me to shame. It puts our love to the word of God to shame that they gave that level of devotion and concern to getting the word of God right, and now we here millennia later, we benefit from the work that they did, and that's just one way to see it and it's as obvious as anything when you look at the original text. Multiple scholars have testified to this.

Well, anyway, that's just a side note. Getting back to the interests of the vine here, and what is going on with the vine, the question is why would God abandon his own vine like that? It's not in his own self-interest. Look at verse 14. Having laid forth this statement about the vine, verse 14,

14 O God of hosts, turn again now, we beseech You; Look down from heaven and see, and take care of this vine, 15 Even the shoot which Your right hand has planted, And on the son whom You have strengthened for Yourself. 16 It is burned with fire, it is cut down; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.

He's pleading with God to take notice of them. He's pleading with God to help them. "God, we are your own plant. You should care for us, therefore, but instead of seeing the benefit of your care, instead here we are lying in desolate ruins and in imminent threat that our existence will cease."

Now, we know from other portions of Scripture that we've even looked at in the recent past here on Tuesday nights, that they were in this position because God was disciplining them for their own sin. We understand that. This Psalm does not confess any sin, which is interesting, but we understand that. What's he doing here? Why isn't this a prayer of confession? Well, what he's doing here is this: rather than looking at this from a man-centered perspective, he's appealing to God, looking at the situation from God's perspective, oh, and is this ever powerful. "God, you're our Shepherd. Look at us not from the position of disciplining us, remember who you are as our Shepherd and deal with us according to the protection, the provision and the guidance that a shepherd gives. God, you planted this vine. Look at us as the vinedresser, look at us as the one who needs the fruit from that vine." He's appealing to God from within God's own motivations, from within God's own actions, "Deal with us according to who you are. None of this is in your interest, O God, and so I'm asking you to show mercy to us for your own name's sake." The way that he has chosen to frame this prayer has a unique way of emphasizing the glory of God and seeking the glory of God in what he prays.

As part of our Five Solas series, we'll talk about Soli Deo Gloria, to the glory of God alone, and this prayer is a reflection of that spirit, to the glory of God alone. He's praying for the glory of God. "God, for your name's sake, for what you have done, answer my

prayer. For your name's sake, show mercy to us." And when we get to Soli Deo Gloria in several weeks, one of the things that we'll say is that that is the unifying principle of creation. That is the purpose for which we are saved and, beloved, it ought to become the defining purpose for which we pray, even. "God, for the sake of your glory, I ask you to answer this prayer. God, for the sake of your glory, deal with me in mercy. God, display the majesty of your name in answering my prayer," not simply praying according to the selfish needs of what we want on a horizontal basis tied to the temporal interests of this life. That's what this Psalm is doing.

In having asked for God's intervention, now he pledges future faithfulness and, oh, this is all just so sweet and what a privilege has been ours to study the Psalms in a systematic way like this because we see this kind of thing that I'm about to say again and again and again: having made his prayer, having concluded his prayer, the petition part of his prayer, now he turns to a pledge about what he will do if and when God answers. Look at verse 17, he says,

17 Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.

In this context, he's probably referring to the nation of Israel rather than looking forward to the Messiah because he's asking for help on the nation here in this Psalm, and all of Scripture in some manner or another, points us forward to Christ but his preeminent thought here is, "God, let your hand be upon us, the man, the nation that you have chosen. You have made us strong. Let your hand, let your power be upon us that we might be delivered."

Then this pledge of faithfulness, verse 18,

18 Then we shall not turn back from You; Revive us [and here's what we'll do, God], and we will call upon Your name.

"God, we will be faithful. God, if you would only answer this prayer, we will praise you in response. We will declare your glory among these nations that now taunt us, among these nations that now laugh at us. We will turn and we will look at them and we will declare your glory from a position of strength that is undeniable to them and we will make your name known."

So he closes the Psalm by repeating the refrain,

19 O LORD God of hosts, restore us; Cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved.

Now, one last thing I want you to see as we tie this Psalm together and as we tie it up for a conclusion here now. As you look at this refrain, I saved this to the end, not only is there a repetition that we've seen clearly in this chorus, in this refrain, verses 3, 7 and 19, but I want you to see that there is an increasing fervency, an increasing emphasis that he

makes even as he repeats the refrain, and he does so by the way that he addresses God. Go back to verse 3, he says, "O God, restore us," and then he expands out on his declaration on the vocative address of God in verse 7, "O God of hosts, restore us." "O God, restore us," and then he steps it up a degree in verse 7, "O God of hosts, restore us." Then in verse 19, he invokes the covenant name, Yahweh, the covenant promise-keeping nature of God in verse 19, he says, "O Yahweh God of hosts, restore us." So there is this ever increasing emphasis that builds up to this climax of urgency by continually expanding the name of God in the refrain. There is a sameness to the refrain and yet there is an increasing elevation so that it ends on that fireworks of appealing to the covenant-keeping nature of God, "Yahweh, restore us. Yahweh, Shepherd. Yahweh, vinedresser. Yahweh, be merciful to us because if you will be kind to us, we will certainly be delivered."

How do we view this as New Testament believers? Well, just turn over to John 10 and I'll remind you of something that Jesus said about himself. John 10:7 and we'll close with this. These statements of Jesus, these "I am" statements of Jesus become all the more precious to us as we draw upon the Old Testament background that is behind them as Jesus spoke to his contemporaries who would have been versed in these kinds of metaphors. In verse 7,

7 ... Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 11 I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

You know, maybe you're here conscious of sin, maybe you're here and you have not been dealing with sin in your life at all and suddenly a spirit of conviction is upon you of how you have violated the character and the love and the law of God with your lawless life or with the lawless period that you've been going through in your life, and you should rightly be convicted if that is indeed the case, but let me encourage you as we close and you find yourself, "I don't even know where to go. My head and my life are so messed up." Don't you see that from Psalm 80 you can go back to the purpose and in John 10, go back to the purpose, "Christ, I appeal to you as the Good Shepherd. You know, in your role as the Good Shepherd, you laid down your life for the sheep. You laid down your life as an atoning sacrifice for sin. You laid down your life so that sinners could be saved. You yourself said that you were like a physician who doesn't see healthy patients, you're the physician who sees sick patients, and here I am, a soul sick with sin, a soul sick with discouragement, and I come to you not because I have anything to offer to you, I come to you because you are Good Shepherd. The whole reason you came was to help miserably lost, miserably helpless people just like me and so I appeal to you based on who you are, Lord Jesus, the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. I come to you on that basis. O God, I come to you through the name of Jesus Christ. O God, I come to you because that is why he came was to lay down his life. I appeal to you to receive me on

that basis and that basis alone." And when you come to him on that basis, you can pour your heart out to him knowing that he will hear you, that he will receive you, that he will answer fully, wisely, lovingly in his good time.

Let's pray together to this great God.

Father, we thank you, we bless you, we honor your holy and majestic name. Be gracious to those here, Father, who find themselves battered by the waves of life. Be to them a Good Shepherd. Be kind to them. Provide for them. Guide them. Bring mercy and comfort into the depths of their soul. And Father, where there is an urgency of physical provision, we ask you to delay it no longer than is absolutely necessary that it might all be sanctified to the good of their souls. But Father, you are our Shepherd. We depend upon you. We need you. We trust you. So Father, we ask you to look upon us with mercy to give help to each one according to the need of each soul, and to lead us forth as a shepherd leads the flock safely into the fold. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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