

Listen and Repent

By Don Green

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Bible Verse: Psalm 81
Preached on: Tuesday, November 27, 2018

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

I'm glad that you're all here with us this evening as we finally return to our series in the Psalms and we're up to Psalm 81, for those of you that are visiting with us. We've done the first 80 Psalms over the past three years or so as we've gone in and out, and now we come to Psalm 81 and I've titled tonight's message "Listen and Repent," and the speaker of that command in Psalm 81 is God himself calling his people to listen to him and to repent and follow him. And I'm very grateful to the Lord for the opportunity we've had to do what we're doing in the Psalms. As I've said and just maybe by way of reminder as we get back into them, we tend to think of the Psalms as devotional writings and we go with that expectation, but what you find when you go through the Psalm systematically is that there is a broad, a very broad range of topics and settings and different things that are being set forth. It is truly a comprehensive hymnbook that deals with the vast array of things that come up in the spiritual life and that came up in the life of Israel when they were the Old Testament nation.

As we come to Psalm 81, having just gone through Psalm 79 and 80, now that may sound like kind of a funny thing to do, as though it were a statement of mathematics, "Well, of course, you just did 79 and 80, you silly guy. That's what comes before Psalm 81." And there's a measure of truth to that, I guess, but in the course of the development of the Psalter and the way that they were put together, there's a significance to that. Psalm 79 and Psalm 80 had been prayers that were made in times of national distress and I want to just show you this ever so briefly.

Look at Psalm 79:1. In Psalm 79:1 it says,

1 O God, the nations have invaded Your inheritance; They have defiled
Your holy temple; They have laid Jerusalem in ruins.

It was a time of crisis and they were looking to God for help. Verse 9,

9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; And
deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name's sake.

"We're in a crisis here, O God. Deliver us. Help us." And that was the prayer, the lament of Psalm 79. In like manner in Psalm 80, it's a prayer for restoration. Verse 3 of Psalm 80, just kind of picking up somewhat at random,

3 O God, restore us, [after he had just prayed in verse 2] 2 ...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?

So the point here for Psalm 79 and Psalm 80 is that there are these laments, there are these prayers for deliverance that mark those two Psalms that we covered when we were with them a couple of months ago. Well, now as you come to Psalm 81, Psalm 81 in the structure of the Psalter is functioning as God's response to those prayers. The people have come, "We're in a desperate situation. God, what do we do? God, help us!" Now in Psalm 81, you get God's response and I want to read the Psalm in its entirety now before we go in and unpack it a little bit verse by verse; as we like to do, we'll deal with the entire Psalm in a single message here.

So picking it up in the inscription,

1 For the choir director; on the Gittith. A Psalm of Asaph. Sing for joy to God our strength; Shout joyfully to the God of Jacob. 2 Raise a song, strike the timbrel, The sweet sounding lyre with the harp. 3 Blow the trumpet at the new moon, At the full moon, on our feast day. 4 For it is a statute for Israel, An ordinance of the God of Jacob. 5 He established it for a testimony in Joseph When he went throughout the land of Egypt. I heard a language that I did not know: 6 "I relieved his shoulder of the burden, His hands were freed from the basket. 7 You called in trouble and I rescued you; I answered you in the hiding place of thunder; I proved you at the waters of Meribah. Selah. 8 Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you; O Israel, if you would listen to Me! 9 Let there be no strange god among you; Nor shall you worship any foreign god. 10 I, the LORD, am your God, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. 11 But My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me. 12 So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, To walk in their own devices. 13 Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways! 14 I would quickly subdue their enemies And turn My hand against their adversaries. 15 Those who hate the LORD would pretend obedience to Him, And their time of punishment would be forever. 16 But I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

So with the context that we established from Psalm 79 and Psalm 80, you have God responding to his people and God bringing to their mind what he would have them do in their time of distress. And we are accustomed, and I tend to interact with people from this general perspective, we tend to be very sympathetic with people in their trials and we

want to weep with those who weep, as Scriptures say, and it's good for us to do that and to interact with people from that sympathetic, loving perspective, but what we find in Psalm 81 is that there comes a time where the people of God need to simply come forward and believe what God has said, to listen to him, to repent of their sins, and to take a proper attitude of joy and submission before him because he is our great God, and the fact that he is God and that he is holy and that Christ has come and redeemed us is enough for us to live life from a position of strength, of confidence, and with a sense of deep-seated joy even if the waters are swirling around us and threatening us with harm. So that's kind of the perspective that we're going to see as we go through this Psalm.

Now in verse 3, if you'll look at it, verse 3 is kind of an interpretive key for the whole Psalm for us and it shows us that this Psalm was to be read at one of Israel's feasts. Verse 3, "Blow the trumpet at the new moon, At the full moon, on our feast day." And as you know, there were national festivals, national feasts that Israel celebrated. This Psalm is probably written in conjunction with what's known as their Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths, the same event. It was a week-long festival which began on the 15th day of their seventh month and that corresponds to fall in our calendar, and the purpose of this feast and this background is important for understanding the overall message of Psalm 81, that's why we're spending time on it, this feast, the Feast of Tabernacles, commemorated how the Jews lived in booths after God had delivered them from Egypt. As they were going through, before they entered the Promised Land, after they had left Egypt, they lived in temporary dwelling-places as they moved from place-to-place, and the Feast of Tabernacles was instituted by God to help them remember as a nation that aspect of their national history. It would be an exponential version of our consideration and celebration of July 4th, if you want to think about it that way. July 4th, I say that and you immediately think Independence Day and the founding of our country, and it has an immediate meaning to you. Well, that is the nature of what God established, that Israel would remember the things that he had done for them in the past.

Go back to the book of Leviticus, if you will, and we will just see this ever so briefly. This is background for Psalm 81. Leviticus 23:39. This was one of the holy convocations that God established for his people after he delivered them from Egypt. In verse 39 it says,

39 'On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day. 40 Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. 41 You shall thus celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42 You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, 43 so that [here's the purpose of all of this] your generations may know that I had the sons of

Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.'

Now, beloved, this is really really important. This is just very very critical. You remember, don't you, that the children of Israel were in slavery in the land of Egypt for a very long time. God raised up Moses and by the signs and wonders that he did at the hands of Moses and the plagues, the 10 plagues that he brought on Egypt, he supernaturally delivered his people from that slavery and that bondage in a foreign land and transplanted them and moved them out of Egypt with the intention eventually to bring them into the Promised Land so that they could be a nation set apart for him. They did not have the power to deliver themselves from Egypt. They lived in slavery for some 400 years there and it was an oppressive difficult time for the people of God, and it's so important for us to remember that. God delivered them from Egypt. God did something in their midst that he wanted them to remember over the course of time, over the course of their national existence.

So this feast was designed to preserve their memory of how God had delivered them from Egypt and so during the Feast of Booths, they lived in tents that they made from the branches of native trees, all designed to impress this on their memory, to remind them of how they as a nation, their forefathers, had lived in the wilderness; it reminded them of a mighty deliverance and it reminded them of God's care for them in the wilderness. This was a festival of rejoicing. This was a time of remembrance to remind everyone, "We have a God and He is the real God and He is a powerful God and He loves us as a people, and He has shown that in time and space in our history when He delivered us out of a miserable existence in Egypt." So every year they would celebrate this Feast of Booths and would have that repeated in their memory again and again and again so that it was imprinted on their national consciousness, that they would remember these things. God gave them a teaching tool, a teaching device that was designed to imprint those things on their minds so that they would never forget.

Now, that context supplies our background for Psalm 81 and we'll refer back to it as we go along. Now let me just say something. There's a three part outline that I'm going to follow here this evening. There's a little funny story behind it that I doubt anyone would ever come across, but just in case they did and also it's just a funny little thing. I prepared this three point outline based on some of the study that I had done, and I went about and basically finished my notes, and this is really funny, then I pulled Steve Lawson's commentary off of my shelf, I like to see what Dr. Lawson has to say about the passages in the Psalms from time-to-time, and I found that his outline was exactly the same as mine which gives me a sense that maybe I got it right, if Steve Lawson thinks it's good, maybe I got something right, but it's just interesting and there's something affirming in seeing that you develop an outline and then you find that somebody else had independently come up with the same outline as well. So that's just a little bit of interesting history on my exposition of Psalm 81 that no one else cares about but me, but there you go.

This Psalm is a call from God on his people and it is a three part call that he makes on them in the midst of their time of distress, and as I like to do, I'd like to just say a little bit of a pastoral word as we go to this. Those of you that are in the midst of some dark times, some difficult times, you know, we all go through those sooner or later, but I would encourage you to let the word of God speak to your heart and to call you to higher spiritual ground. It's not always the best thing for us to do, to simply commiserate with each other in our difficulty, in our sorrow, and just walk out from the conversation, walk out from our fellowship in the same place that we were but say, "Well, at least my friends sympathized with me." Okay, there's a place for that. I've said that, I don't need to repeat it here, but there is a time for us to step back and to remember who our God is and to remember who Christ is, and that there is a spiritual response that should take place in the hearts of his people as we remember who God is and what he has done for us. There comes a time where it's time to stop complaining. There comes a time where we stop simply always asking for deliverance and we recognize who God is and we respond to him rightly and we respond to him for the sake of who he is. God is God. Christ is Lord. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ has ascended. Christ is coming back. And for the people of God, for true Christians who have been born again by the Spirit of God, that should evoke a spiritual response that takes us out of, that leads us out of our self-pity, that leads us out of our fear, and in our hearts we respond to God simply for who he is and who he is calls forth a response from his people.

So we're going to look at this from three different aspects. First of all, we're going to see a call to rejoice. A call to rejoice. Philippians 4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! " And this response of joy is not simply an emotional reaction to favorable circumstances, a sense of satisfaction because life is going the way that we want to, beloved, we need to realize, we need to come to grips with, we need to grow spiritually and say, "There is a responsibility that I have to live in joy simply because of who Christ is, simply because of who God is." Rejoice in the Lord always, and as we remember that, there is a response of joy that is the appropriate and even commanded response of the people of God to their God and it's a lot easier to preach this from a pulpit rather than to try to have this in a private conversation with people who are in difficult circumstances, it's easier and it's better for you to hear this for yourself and to apply it to your own heart and to let that be your own response to the word of God here tonight.

Now, after their laments in Psalm 79 and 80, the people of God needed to get back to the basics. They needed to get back to the basics. Look at verse 1,

1 Sing for joy to God our strength; Shout joyfully to the God of Jacob. 2
Raise a song, strike the timbrel, The sweet sounding lyre with the harp. 3
Blow the trumpet at the new moon,

Beloved, there are five imperatives in those opening three verses: sing, shout, raise, strike, and blow, and all of this is calling for a musical joyful response to the reality of who God is. God is the God of omnipotent strength. He is the omnipresent, omniscient Lord who is sovereign over all things. He is the God who has shown love to his people. He is the God of loyal love, of faithfulness to his people and that transcends our

individual circumstances. That transcends national life. For the people of God, for us living in America today, the greatness of God and the goodness of God transcends our circumstances in such a way and with such certainty and with such power that it is always the right and appropriate response for us to offer up joy to him from our hearts that says, "God, I find my satisfaction in you alone. I rejoice that you are who you are. The fact that you are God and that you rule over the universe and you rule over my life gives me occasion to sing, to respond to you with joy, to shout it out, to bring music to bear on the nature of my response of worship." And the mere fact that God is who he is, is enough for us to rejoice and we need to have that clear in our minds.

Think about it. It couldn't be any other way, beloved. It really couldn't. We do not offer God conditional worship. We do not offer God worship that is conditioned on our circumstances. We worship God before he heals us. We worship God before he delivers us from our financial distress. We worship God now because he is worthy of worship independent of our circumstances. He is worthy of worship independent of anything and the call of God, the call of Scripture on our hearts is that we would respond to him in that way and to love him even if nothing about our circumstances would otherwise commend an attitude of joy and worship to him.

Let's go to a passage that we've looked at multiple times. Turn to the minor prophets at the back of your Old Testament to the book of Habakkuk, or as our beloved friend, Andrew Snelling, would say, Habakkuk, and other places in the world would say Habakkuk, but we in America say Habakkuk and I want you to look at the end of chapter 3 in Habakkuk as we contemplate this. There is something challenging about this when you work your way all the way through, there is something immensely liberating about it as well. In chapter 3, verse 16, Habakkuk is responding to the vision that God has given to him that not only are things bad but they are going to get worse because a foreign nation is going to invade his land and carry the people off into exile, and God has prepared him for that statement through 2 ½ chapters of Habakkuk and now the book ends with Habakkuk's response of faith. Look at Habakkuk 2:4 says,

4 Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.

Now what does that faith look like? What is faith like when life is adverse to us? When circumstances are adverse? When relationships are broken and we're simply left with who God is and we have nothing else to go on? What then? What does faith look like then? Habakkuk says in chapter 3, verse 16, he says,

16 I heard and my inward parts trembled, At the sound my lips quivered.
Decay enters my bones, And in my place I tremble. Because I must wait
quietly for the day of distress, For the people to arise who will invade us.

Then he goes on and says in verse 17,

17 Though the fig tree should not blossom And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold And there be no cattle in the stalls,

Devastation. Famine. "When that comes, God, this will be my response." Verse 18,

18 Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.

Beloved, are you in the midst of, have you been discouraged and despairing for a very long period of time? I've been there. What I want you to see is that the simplicity of this statement is the answer to all of your despair. God is who God is. God reigns. God loves his people. God is independent of time. God is independent of circumstances. He rules over all and for us in this New Testament age, we know him as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who loved us and gave himself up for us on the cross, the one who loved me and gave himself up for me, first person singular, Galatians 2:20. And what I want you to see even if it seems murky and cloudy to you right now, what I want you to see is that this is the light shining in the darkness toward you and you move in this direction even if you don't quite have your hands and your mind around it altogether just yet. The person of Christ, the reality of who God is, is sufficient to bring you joy even in the midst of circumstances that won't change. It is all that you need and it could be no other way. We rejoice not in God plus something else, we rejoice not in God plus healing, we don't rejoice in God plus financial windfall, we don't rejoice in God plus, "I've got the relationships I want." No. No. No, I will exalt in the Lord. I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. Who he is and all of his great perfections is enough to satisfy my heart, and that declaration is a declaration of faith, that response of joy is right and proper even when life is going downhill fast on the roller-coaster. It is right, it is proper, it is good, it is possible for us to have a settled joy simply because God is who he is, Christ is who he is. Christ reigns. Christ has died, Christ is risen and that's enough.

When we return that kind of joyful worship to God in the midst of things, we are showing forth his glory. We are manifesting his inherent intrinsic worth. He takes away sometimes everything from us in order to establish his sufficiency in our lives in the long term. Once you've seen that, my friends, suddenly you are gloriously liberated from the tyranny of your circumstances. You are liberated in principle even if you're fighting the battle sometimes along the way, you're liberated from a fear of the future. "I've lost it all," you say, "and I've found my sufficiency in Christ. I've found joy in Christ even when there were no cattle in the stalls. That means that if I lose it again in the future, His sufficiency is going to be just the same because He is immutable, He is unchanging. He is God over all that is enough to satisfy my heart." And that, beloved, is all you need. That's all you need. Christ and Christ alone is enough for the broken heart.

Now go back, if you will, to Psalm 81. That was an extended excursion on things. But I say this gently, I say it as an encouragement to you, I say it to beckon you to higher spiritual ground, you will do your soul a favor if you hold yourself accountable to that kind of principle in your walk with Christ. Rather than giving in to the press of

discouragement, giving in to the press of disappointing circumstances, say, "Why am I worried here? Why is my soul cast down?" Hope again in God.

Turn to Psalm 42. You find this woven throughout all of Scripture and you come and you preach to yourself. You come and you speak to yourself about biblical reality, about spiritual reality as it is revealed in Scripture as God has made himself known, as the one who loves your soul has made himself known to you, and you start to reason within your heart, you start to speak to yourself in this way, Psalm 42:5,

5 Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence.

The chorus is repeated in verse 11,

11 Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

Again in Psalm 43:5,

5 Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.

The biblical pattern in times of discouragement is for you to speak truth to your troubled heart rather than letting your troubled heart manage your mind and your emotions and drive you places where you don't need to go and you speak truth to your heart. "Why are you discouraged? Why are you in despair? Why should I be discouraged when Christ is my Lord, when Christ is my champion?" If you're a believer in Christ, your heart will respond to that, it will conform to the truth, it will submit to the truth that you bring to bear upon it, but you have a responsibility to stir that response of faith up in your own life. Your pastor, your husband, your wife, your children, can't do it for you. You have to do it yourself and this is the way that we exercise our faith.

So here going back to Psalm 81 now, we find God calling them to rejoice and we see that this is a pattern elsewhere in Scripture. So the Psalmist here in Psalm 81 has called Israel, has called the whole nation to sing to the Lord who is their strength, and how does that fit in with the context of the national laments in all of that? Well, the answer to their lament was to respond in obedient joy; to exercise faith and to rejoice accordingly. In their weakness, to look to the strength of their God and let his strength be the answer to their weakness just like, just like in Egypt his strength was the answer to their weakness in slavery. They've already been through this nationally. This has been proven in the course of their national existence. God's strength is the answer to our weakness. God's joy and our response of faithful joy is the answer to our discouragement. So he is stirring them up

to an obedient internal response in the midst of their difficulty. Sing for joy. Shout joyfully. Raise a song. Blow the trumpet. Verse 4,

4 For it is a statute for Israel, An ordinance of the God of Jacob.

You know, one other place that I want to take you to and the Lord knows that I'm retracing some of my own spiritual footsteps in some of these things that I'm saying and places where I fell short so many times because I either didn't do this or didn't know at the time that this was what it was supposed to be like. In the book of Job 1:20, you know the story, you know the devastation. He lost it all. He lost his family except for his wife and later on he probably kind of wished he had lost her too. But at this point, he had just heard that he had lost his sons and daughters, he had lost his wealth, he had lost his flocks, it was all gone, and what did Job do in chapter 1, verse 20?

20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head [an expression of humility, an expression of submission], and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." 22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

The response of joy, the response of worship, his response of dependence, of submission, of recognition of the Lord's sovereignty even in the midst of our adversity and say, "Lord, just as you brought me prosperity in the past, now you have brought adversity. My circumstances have changed but you haven't and therefore I give you the same response of joyful, dependent, faithful, faith-informed worship in this time of adversity that I gladly gave to you in prosperity. I give you equal worship whatever the spectrum may be." And there's a point where sooner or later only the real Christians, only the true Christians can do that. So if your adversity has been severe, take it as a spiritual opportunity in which you say, "Do you know what I'm going to do here? I don't know what anybody else is going to do, what I'm going to do is I'm going to rise to the occasion and I am going to ascribe to God with joy the worship, the faith, the trust, of which he is preeminently worthy. And yeah, I realize I'm saying that to people in the context of a lot of trouble. It's not my place, it's not my desire to shave down the biblical call in a misplaced effort at sympathy. This is the call of God on us. This is how we respond to adversity and he is worthy of it.

Think about it, beloved, isn't it true that whatever our adversity may be as we try to live for Christ in this fallen world, think about it from this perspective, isn't it true, isn't it undeniable that Christ underwent a far greater adversity on our behalf at the cross when he bore the punishment, he bore the wrath of God that was designated, so to speak, for our sins of which our sins were deserving? Christ went through a great adversity and agony at Gethsemane and at the cross than we will ever go through and he didn't deserve it. Sometimes we're just dealing with the consequences of our own sin and the level of adversity that God brings to us never measures up to the adversity that Christ suffered on our behalf and he gladly bore the cross. Can we not in response go through some

adversity, go through some sorrow, go through some loss and still worship him after what he has done for us in providing and securing our full salvation? Isn't that just right? That's just the right thing to do, isn't it? That's the way we should respond to Christ and we do well to remember that we are tempted in our adversity to lose sight of all of that; to let our circumstances blind us to the greater reality of who our God is. Well, part of the reason that we gather together around God's word is to stir ourselves up by way of reminder of these things as we look to what Scripture says.

Now, the feast day for Israel reminded them of how God had provided in the past. We've already covered that. Verse 4, statue for Israel, an ordinance for the God of Jacob. God had given them a picture lesson by which to remember him. We have our own picture lesson, don't we, in the New Testament to help us remember? We call it Communion, the Lord's Table. God gives us a picture, a tangible symbol, a brief simple reminder, a remembrance of who Christ is and what he did. His body symbolized by the bread. His blood symbolized by the juice, the wine for some. Communion reminds us of what God has done for us in the past; it reminds us of what Christ has done. So even here in the church age, God has given us a remembrance lest we forget and we remember and we're humbled and as we remember, we're brought back to the place of faith.

Now as we continue on in Psalm 81 as we should do if I'm going to finish it tonight, as we come to verse 5, we come to a verse with a bit of an interpretive challenge. Look at verse 5 with me. We're still in this call to joy.

5 He established it for a testimony in Joseph When he went throughout the land of Egypt. [Then there's this phrase that says] I heard a language that I did not know:

Now it's not clear and interpreters vary, they differ with one another on this, it's not clear who heard what voice. It's possible that it refers to in the context Israel hearing the Egyptian language during their adversity there, the Egyptian language was foreign to them when they went over there. It could refer to Israel hearing God's voice at Sinai. It may refer to God hearing the voice of the Israelites, although that seems unlikely to me. Perhaps it's best for us to see here the Psalmist speaking the first person and saying he heard the voice of God in what he's about to say so that he's now claiming, there is a pivot as he goes from the second and third person, he pivots and he goes to the first person in verses 6 through 16 and it seems like the Psalmist is now turning into God's mouthpiece in what follows. In other words, God has spoken to the Psalmist in a way that the Psalmist is now going to be his mouthpiece in what follows. Whatever you decide about that, whatever the interpretive decision one makes about that point, it's clear that at this point the Psalmist is pivoting. He's gone from a call to rejoice and now there's going to be another aspect to the way that God speaks to his people and what he calls for them in this Psalm, and what you see now is God addressing his people directly, God speaking in the first person.

Look at this as we look at the rest of the Psalm and set the stage for it. In verse 8 it says, "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you." This is God speaking to his people. In

verse 11, "But My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me." And in verse 13, "Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!" So God is now speaking to his nation, speaking to his people, and addressing them directly in the response that he wants from them. And what does he want from them? After there has been this opening call to rejoice, well, point 2, he here is making now a call to remember. A call to remember, and what we see as we go through this beginning in verse 6, is that true worship in part sometimes will involve recalling the past and what has happened in the past, and in verse 6 you'll see this with me. Verse 6, God is now speaking in the first person and he says,

6 I relieved his shoulder of the burden, His hands were freed from the basket.

God is telling them to remember what their national hard labor was like in Egypt. Remember how they had to make bricks and then they had to go out and gather straw to make their own bricks? They carried baskets of clay, sand and bricks at the command of their masters. It was hard labor. It was wearisome. It was tedious and that was their experience and God is saying, "I want you to remember, O Israel, I want you to remember, O My people, I delivered you from that. I delivered you from that hardship."

Look at verse 7, he says,

7 You called in trouble and I rescued you; I answered you in the hiding place of thunder; I proved you at the waters of Meribah.

The thunder there referring to the giving of the law at Sinai in Exodus 19 when the law came and there was thunder booming. The water at Meribah, Exodus 17, God provided for them in their need. They were thirsty. God provided water for them miraculously. He's making a broader point, he's making a bigger point here, beloved. It's not simply a history lesson, he is reminding them of history and calling them to remember so that they will remember the greater point. The greater point is that God had met with them, God had delivered them. God heard their cries and responded in kindness, in love, and relieved their hardship and he says, "You remember what I did for you in the past, My people." And you would think that a people who had experienced that kind of deliverance from their God would be grateful, would be dependent, would be trusting. "Look at what He's done for us in the past! Yeah, we got some adversity here but our God is a God of deliverance, is a God of power, a God who is faithful to us." You'd think that's what they would do but they hadn't. They turned away from God. They turned to idolatry. They turned to the gods of the people in the lands in which they were dwelling and so God has reminded them of his prior deliverance and now he speaks to them in the present in verse 8. He says,

8 "Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you; O Israel, if you would listen to Me! [just listen to Me] 9 "Let there be no strange god among you; Nor shall you worship any foreign god.

God is saying to them here in this section, "Listen to Me!" He says it three times in those same three verses. Verse 8, "Hear, O My people. O Israel, if you would listen to Me." Verse 11, "But My people did not listen to My voice." Verse 13, "O that My people would listen to Me." It's the common Hebrew word "shema" that is being referenced there and the word "shema" in this context is signifying this sense, "Listen to Me," in the sense of, "Follow Me and obey Me." You parents can understand that. You've dealt with rebellious kids and you say, "Listen to me." You're wanting them to do more than simply hear the words that you speak, you want them to hear and obey, right? "Listen to me." We use the word like that in English. "You need to listen to Me," God is saying, "You need to follow Me. You need to obey Me. I wish My people would listen to Me." A parent could say, "I wish my children would listen to me." They're wanting the children to respond in obedience to them.

That's what God is saying here and in the whole context of what has been said, Psalm 79, Psalm 80, beloved, the point in this is the time for lamenting is over. This has gone on long enough. Yes, you are suffering but it's time to stop lamenting your suffering and time to get serious about faith and obedience. It's time to turn. It's time to pivot. Now it's time for faith and submission. Now there comes a point where in your sorrow, in your hardship, in your adversity, in your trials, there comes a point where the regret, the complaining, it's time for that to stop and to say, "Now it's time for me to have faith. It's time for me to exercise my faith in Christ. It's time for me to submit. It's time for me to trust Him." You say, "But this really massive adversity has plummeted like a meteor into my life and exploded on the scene." Okay, yeah, asteroids hit the earth sometimes and we work through some of the consequences of that, but when the dust from the impact starts to settle, it's time to stop reciting the fact that a meteor has hit our lives and to just move on and say, "It's time, it's time to continue believing God. It's time to trust Him. It's time to submit to Him because that's who God is and that's what He is worthy of." You work it all through to the end and God is the same now as he was before your trial hit. You loved him, you worshiped him then when you were in the light, keep loving and worshiping and trusting him in the darkness.

God reminds them in verse 10 and says in contrast to verse 9, "You've gone after these strange gods, you've gone after idols," and he says in verse 10,

10 I, the LORD, am your God, Who brought you up from the land of Egypt;

"Don't you remember who I am? I am your God, not them. You need to turn away from your false worship, you need to turn away from your idolatry and come back to Me, your true God and listen to Me. Follow Me. Trust Me." At the risk of repeating myself, beloved, the call of the God of the Bible on his people today in the church, in this church age, on this side of the cross, is of multiplied force to us. Consider in your mind the cross. Remember the cross. Remember Christ. Remember his love. Remember his suffering. Remember his blood. Remember how they beat him. Remember how they thrust the crown of thorns into his head. Remember how he spoke not a word against it, but rather from the cross prayed, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing."

Remember who your Christ is and realize that he has established in time and space in genuine history, this is not some ethereal idea of which we speak, we speak of the real God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who literally did all of those things for us and realize that now that he has conquered death for us, now that he has ascended on high, your response of faith and joy in him is the only proper response to make to him regardless of what your circumstances may be. He is greater than your circumstances. The history from 2,000 years ago is greater than the history being made today and we respond on the basis of who Christ is and what he has done for us and we trust him, we obey him, we follow him even if it's hard.

So God calls his people to remember. They've been called to rejoice, they've been called to remember and now finally in the last section of the Psalm, we see the call to repent. The call to repent. Rejoice. Remember. And repent. Christ is who he is, I rejoice in that. Christ did what he did, I remember that. And now we bring it down to a point of application, that there is a spiritual response from within our hearts that we make to that and it's a call to repent.

God had delivered them from Egypt but Israel responded in rebellion. Verse 11. Remember verse 10, he said, "I brought you up from the land of Egypt," but what did they do? Verse 11,

11 But My people did not listen to My voice, And Israel did not obey Me.

Do you see the parallelism there? "They did not listen to My voice," parallel to, "Obey Me." That's the idea. "Listen to Me. Obey Me," is the idea. "My people didn't listen to Me," and so what did God do? He let them go their own way.

Verse 12,

12 So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, To walk in their own devices.

They abandoned the God who had delivered them and they abandoned the God who had promised to defeat their enemies going forward if they would just be loyal to him, and you can read about that in Deuteronomy 6 among other places.

At one level, this is utter insanity for a people to leave the God who delivered them, the one true God. It's utter insanity at that level, but you start to realize how deeply rooted and how deceitful sin is. Sin is so dark, so compelling, so compulsive, so blinding in its effect that it will make an entire nation, it will make a people turn away from the God who had delivered them in the first place. It's utterly irrational and the only way that reason is going to be restored here is if they repent of their rebellion. So God gave them over in verse 12. "That's what you want? You can go your way." But God is still calling them back. Despite their hard-hearted response to him, God is still disposed toward compassion toward his people.

Verse 13,

13 Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!

He's saying, "Your sorrow is self-inflicted. I'm ready to deliver you, but it's time to repent."

He says in verse 14,

14 I would quickly subdue their enemies And turn My hand against their adversaries.

"Oh, your lamenting here in Psalm 79 and Psalm 80, would you just rejoice in Me? Would you remember who I am? Would you repent and I'll be glad to step into the breach." The occasion for their laments came from their own rebellion and God calls them to return to him, the one who had delivered them in the past, and promised continued goodness for them in the future.

But in the context of the Feast of Booths, this national annual feast, the word is this: don't just go through the motions, don't simply go through the outer conformity with the festival that's been given to you, rend your heart, repent. Don't partake of this festival, don't partake of this ceremony while you are still conditioned towards sin and embracing your own rebellion. Don't go through the outer motions if the inner reality isn't there.

Verse 15,

15 Those who hate the LORD would pretend obedience to Him, And their time of punishment would be forever.

It's not enough to go through the motions, it needs to come from your heart. That's why we try to say every time we have Communion, "Don't do this haphazardly. Don't do this when you're holding onto sin. Let this time of remembrance be a genuine one where you have repented from your heart of all known sin and you are gratefully, joyfully responding in a repentant faith to the Christ who is being remembered in this ceremony."

You see, again, I say this from time-to-time, if I had the capacity to flip my pulpit now, if I had the physical strength to do it, I would do it here because the call of Christ on your life is not for you to simply go through an external conformity with a show of religion that is not real in your heart and that is not marked by genuine heartfelt repentance and faith and walking and following Christ as he has revealed himself in his word.

I have to tell you, this has been on my mind a lot. I need to say this on a Sunday morning when everybody is here, not just some. Yeah, you know, I worry about this. I worry about this. I lose sleep over this very thing, that there would be people within the body of Truth Community Church, people who are with us week-to-week, young people, old

people, men, women, content to just go through the motions as if an outer conformity once or twice a week would be a sufficient response to Christ when the reality in life is that your heart is very far from him; that you couldn't care less about obedience and that sometimes being here is just more a matter of keeping up appearances before men rather than the overflow of a heart that is engaged in joyful repentance, joyful remembrance, joyful faith in the God of your salvation. I worry about that. Yeah, I do. There's not a whole lot I can do about it.

You know, your ears listen for people to talk about Christ, not just the events of a day, your ears listen for expressions of love for Christ, love for his word, and I get a lot of that here. I don't want you to think I'm making a blanket statement about everybody at Truth because it's not like that at all. That's not my point at all, but sometimes you have to address the segments, the minorities maybe hopefully, the minorities that are just going through the motions and are content to go through life without any accountability, without any sense of genuine love for Christ marking them. Christ could fall out of the universe and it really wouldn't even change the way they live. How are we supposed to think that people like that are genuine Christians? How are we supposed to think that? I ask you?

It wasn't for no purpose that Christ warned us that there would be tares among the wheat; that there would be amongst the true people of God those who had the outward appearance but not the inner reality. I don't want that for any of you. What kind of pastor would I be if I didn't at least point that out and warn you to examine yourself from time-to-time? Yeah, I know, you're a member. Okay, great. You're a member, that's great. Good. Good, but are you satisfied with that status on a piece of paper someplace apart from the living reality of a dynamic faith that is energizing and engaging your life and is giving you a different perspective on all of your trials and adversities? That's where the reality is, beloved. That's what God is worthy of. He doesn't accept anything less.

Look at it again there in verse 15, "Those who hate the LORD would pretend obedience to Him." You know, Hollywood makes a lot of money with people pretending to be people they aren't. That doesn't carry any currency in the church of Christ. No pretense. It's got to be real and so we all do well to examine our own hearts. You on the live stream, you too. You too.

With all of that, this Psalm ends with a word of God of promise, of blessing, and we see that to whatever extent throughout the ages the people of God have let that be their experience, that sub-reality, that substitute of reality and just content with the external appearances, the problem with that kind of hypocrisy is always in the person, it's not in God because the disposition of God has been established for all time.

He says there in verse 16,

16 [For my part] I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.

After all their rebellion, God still says, "I would be glad to bless you. I would be glad to care for you if you would just rejoice, remember and repent."

So this Psalm ends on the invitation to return to God and be blessed. You know, for all of the call to self-examination just now, it ends on this, it ends on the promise of the blessing of God for the people who would seek him like that. God is a rewarder of those who seek him. That's inherent in true faith, Hebrews 11. God is a rewarder of those who seek him but it's a seeking of reality, not a pretense. It's not an outward conformity just to satisfy the eye-test from men. It is a heart devotion before this great God, now for us before this great Christ that is the call of the reality.

What's our take-away, then? I'll let Charles Spurgeon have the final word. He says and I quote, "The Lord can do great things for an obedient people. When His people walk in the light of His countenance and maintain unsullied holiness, the joy and consolation which He yields them are beyond conception. To them, the joys of heaven have begun even upon earth. They can sing in the ways of the Lord. The spring of the eternal summer has commenced with them. They are already blessed and they look for brighter things. This shows us, by contrast, how sad a thing it is for a child of God to sell himself into captivity to sin and bring his soul into a state of famine by following after another god." And he closes and I invite you to bow with me in prayer as we close in this way, Spurgeon closes that great section by saying this and this is our closing prayer as the musicians come, "O Lord, forever bind us to Yourself alone and keep us faithful unto the end." Amen.

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