

Revive Us Again

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Bible Verse: Psalm 85
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As we were singing that song, "Be still my soul," it's kind of a reminder of the fact that the hymn-writer recognized in that the struggles that come to the people of God and it's just so very important for us to realize, for us to know, for us to expect the fact that there will be challenges that come to us in the spiritual life, even as those who know Christ and are walking with him; that the promise of the Gospel, the promise of full harmony and full rest and full peace, the fullness of that is something that we don't experience until we are with Christ in heaven, meanwhile on the earth we are men of flesh and, "man is born for trouble as the sparks fly upward," Job 5:7 says. So it's just very critical for us to know what to expect so that we are not unduly discouraged that we are not somehow thinking that something has gone colossally wrong when trials come, when adversity hits, when sorrows seem to overwhelm us like the waves of the sea repeatedly falling upon the seashore. Sometimes it's like that. Now praise be to God, it's not always like that and for some the Lord spares them that experience, and so it's not that it's always like that but this is an expected part for many in the spiritual life and that's one of the great benefits that we have of teaching through the Psalms is that we see this theme repeatedly.

Well, tonight we come to Psalm 85 and I invite you to turn to Psalm 85 because it will be our text for this evening and I'm going to read it in its entirety as we get started here now. Psalm 85. The inscription reads, "For the choir director. A Psalm of the sons of Korah."

1 O LORD, You showed favor to Your land; You restored the captivity of Jacob. 2 You forgave the iniquity of Your people; You covered all their sin. Selah. 3 You withdrew all Your fury; You turned away from Your burning anger. 4 Restore us, O God of our salvation, And cause Your indignation toward us to cease. 5 Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations? 6 Will You not Yourself revive us again, That Your people may rejoice in You? 7 Show us Your lovingkindness, O LORD, And grant us Your salvation. 8 I will hear what God the LORD will say; For He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones; But let them not turn back to folly. 9 Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, That glory may dwell in our land. 10 Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. 11 Truth springs from the earth, And righteousness looks down from heaven. 12 Indeed, the LORD will give what is good,

And our land will yield its produce. 13 Righteousness will go before Him
And will make His footsteps into a way.

We see that this is another Psalm of the sons of Korah. As we've said in the past, these were descendants of Levi who served as the gatekeepers and musicians in the temple at Jerusalem. They were those who had a unique responsibility for the conduct of worship at the temple in Jerusalem, and even that little bit of information is informative to us, is helpful to us to understand that those closely associated with worship have the experience of that which I was describing in my introduction.

Now there's nothing in the text that indicates the historical setting of the Psalm but the opening reference points to a past restoration from captivity and combined with a plea for mercy which follows, it would seem that the events that underlie this Psalm would coincide with the Jews' return from their captivity in Babylon. You recall that they went away into Babylon, they were carried off into exile for 70 years, carried away from the land as a discipline for their sins and their idolatry, and God was punishing them, disciplining them; they were feeling the consequences of their disobedience to God in the result of their national apostasy, you might say. Well, in this period of time after the 70 years of captivity had expired, Cyrus, the king of Persia, allowed them to return to their land after Babylon fell to Persia in 538. They repaired the temple, the Jews did when they got back, but the conditions were not as favorable as they had been in the days prior to the exile. They didn't have the glory days, the restoration seemed incomplete because it was not like the former glory that they had had prior to the exile, and by the time of Nehemiah a few decades later after their return, you read this if you'll go to Nehemiah 1:3, before the book of Job and before the book of Esther, Nehemiah 1. Nehemiah is given a report about the condition of the city of Jerusalem. He was not in Jerusalem. Someone comes to him and gives a report and says in verse 2, "some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem." And here's what they said to him, "They said to me, 'The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.'" Their initial return from captivity which seemed so promising had yielded in time to more discouragement, more destruction, more despair, and their fortunes had improved only to slip back into defeat. Their hopes were elevated and yet it came back and they were discouraged once again. This cycle of captivity and restoration and then further decline would have had a great and depressing effect upon their spiritual condition, and it seems as though Psalm 85 may have been written in connection with that sort of time frame.

So we ask this question, then, and one that we can all relate to on a personal basis: what are the people of God to do in such times? You know what it's like. You know what this is like on a daily basis, you know what this is like over the course of life. You all, I would venture to say without exception, those of you that are Christians anyway, would understand something of the fact that you wake up in the morning, you have a quiet time, it seems as though you've had an earnest time in the word, an earnest time in prayer, and then just a couple of hours later, something goes wrong and you're in a spiritual spiral, you've reacted badly or your anxiety has hit you again with full and greater force.

I had interactions not too long ago with someone struggling with sin and the person said to me, he said, "You know, I had such a great time with the Lord and I thought things were going so well and then here I was back in the muck of things again just a short time later. It's hard for me to understand." Well, we understand something of those waves of discouragement that come and we lack the consistency that we would desire, or we think that things are getting better only to find that there is another setback that has caused us further discouragement. What are God's people to do in such times? Perhaps on a greater basis, you think that relationships are going to work out and they don't. You feel like maybe you're getting some progress with a difficult family situation where you've been longing for restoration for a long period of time only to see the improvement give way to another argument and further distress in the relationship and alienation where you had hopes of restoration taking place. What are God's people to do in such times when the progress seems to slip back? Two steps forward are followed by three steps back and the cycle of that begins to wear on you spiritually, what are God's people to do in such times? What can you do in times like that to find your way forward once again. Well, the Psalmist here in Psalm 85 gives us a path forward and what you find when you understand a little bit of the circumstances around, what you find him doing is this, he starts here with our first point this evening, he starts with praise for past mercies. Praise for past mercies.

Beloved, no matter what your present discouragement may be, it is always appropriate for you to think back to the mercies that God has shown you in the past and thank him for those; to remember those; to refresh your heart by thanking God for what he has done for you in the past no matter what the present discouragement may be. Beloved, it is always appropriate for you to thank God for what he has done for you in your life, no matter if you've stumbled badly, no matter if the discouragement is very deep. It is always appropriate for you to stir up your heart and remember whatever else is happening today, "I remember the kindnesses that God has shown me in the past and I'll thank him for those at least. I remember those. I haven't forgotten. I'll give him thanks."

This is what the Psalmist is doing in Psalm 85, beginning in verse 1. He says,

1 O LORD, You showed favor to Your land; You restored the captivity of Jacob.

Do you see how he's looking to the past? "I remember back when You restored us, where You brought us back out of captivity and You showed favor to Your land by restoring Your people to it. What had You done in that time?" Verse 2,

2 You forgave the iniquity of Your people; You covered all their sin.

Now, in the midst of that present discouragement of the decline that followed after their seeming restoration from their captivity, the Psalmist steps back from that discouragement, steps back from that which was right in front of his face and says, "Lord, I remember what You did in the past and I thank You for that because that was a real

genuine mercy that we did not deserve. Thank You for bringing us back from that captivity. Thank You for forgiving the sin that prompted You to send us into captivity in the first place. Thank You for the kindness that You have shown to us as a nation."

Now those of you that are Christians and you're going through a time of discouragement, I understand that the tendency for us all is to focus our attention and to focus our prayers, "God, get me out of this present problem! I do not like the discomfort of it. Deliver me from this present situation that I am in," whatever the circumstances of that may be. But do you start to see, do you start to understand as we walk with the Lord we realize that we are in the midst of a process that God is working out and that we need to focus on more than just the immediate thing that is in front of us, step back and remember the fullness of what God is doing in your life? What he has done? How he delivered you from sin, perhaps how he delivered you from gross iniquity when he caused you to be born again and your life changed and you knew suddenly a joy and a peace and a confidence in Christ that you had not known before? You remember that, right? You remember those kinds of days, right, where the darkness and confusion and the lack of understanding of spiritual things gave way to new life in Christ when you were born again and there was a freshness of spiritual life? His word became alive to you? There was an urgency and a sincerity in prayer and you saw God answering things and doing things in your life and opening doors? You remember that, right? Even though today is not like that, you remember how those things are a part of your spiritual experience, right? It hasn't always been dark. It hasn't always been difficult for you, right? Then isn't it fitting for you to step back and say, "Lord, it's hard right now but at the very least I can thank You for those past mercies that You've given to us."

Verse 3 of Psalm 85,

3 You withdrew all Your fury; You turned away from Your burning anger.

"O God, You had such a righteous cause for Your wrath to be abiding upon me. God, You had such good and righteous reasons to have me in the cross-hairs of Your anger and yet, Lord, what did You do? You brought the Gospel of Christ to me. Someone came to me and gave me the word of God and said God will forgive all of your sins if you believe in Christ. Someone brought that message to me, Lord, under the prompting of Your Spirit, under the prompting of Your eternal plan, and You brought the Gospel to me and told me that Christ died for all of my sins and my sins could be forgiven through faith in Him." You remember that, right? Somebody somewhere told you about Christ and the lights went on and you believed and God showed mercy to your soul, right?

Well, isn't today no matter where you're sitting, if you're here in Christ no matter what kinds of frustrations you're feeling in life, no matter what you've lost, no matter what seemingly has been taken away from you, isn't it appropriate for you, isn't it right for you, isn't it appropriate for a child of God to look back, to say, "Lord, I can set this moment aside and I can thank You for the grace that You've shown me in the past"? We don't have to go right into a lament over our current circumstances, do we? Isn't God himself, isn't Christ lovely enough, isn't Christ good enough, isn't Christ worthy of us to honor

him, to thank him, to praise him without immediately going into what our present trouble may be? Isn't he worthy of that? Well, part of spiritual growth, part of spiritual maturity in your life is exercising and recognizing that and exercising your effort in prayer in a way that says, "Lord, this is so hard but I'm going to forceably turn my attention away from my present circumstance and just thank You," without qualification, without condition, without tying it to something I want, "God, I just thank You for the mercy that You have shown to my soul." That's a great place to start. The Psalmist shows us to praise God for his past mercy.

Now what had happened here is that the exile had been a severe stroke of discipline upon the people of God but God returned to them and he returned to his people with grace and kindness and their homecoming was a joyful time. God had covered their sins. You can read about this in Ezra 1 to 6. He had set aside the wrath that led to the exile and the nation knew his blessing once again and what the Psalmist is doing is he's putting his present conflict, his present difficulty in the broader context of God's dealings with his people.

Now, those of you that are like me, I need to pray for you more to the extent that you're like me, those of you that have a naturally pessimistic bent to your disposition and outlook on life as I do, I'll be honest with you, those of you that are worried and tend toward anxiety because of the possible future threats to the nature of your life, your finances, your health, you name it, take note of this and let this sink deeply into your heart what we've been talking about here this evening. I ask you one more time: has God shown mercy to you in Christ? Has God caused you to be born again through faith in Jesus Christ? Has he really genuinely delivered you in such a way that you are no longer under the threat of condemnation from his hand because he has been so good and merciful to you? Are your sins forgiven? Has he delivered you from darkness? Well, then the appropriate thing for you to do right now in this day of difficulty in your life is to praise him for that kind of great mercy on your life. That is the right thing to do. It is appropriate and fitting for the people of God to give praise to their God and present difficulties do not erase the past grace that he has shown to you. They do not contradict it. They do not change it. What God has done in your life in the past where he has shown you grace and mercy is an enduring part of your spiritual history that is always appropriate to go back and give thanks to him for, isn't it?

Now the Psalmist goes further. He starts there but he doesn't stop there. It's not like that is a comprehensive response of the soul to its present difficulties, and as we talk, as we kind of transition here into the second point which we'll call his prayer for future mercies, let me be quick and swift to remind you of something else that is necessary for the beleaguered soul that is especially necessary and helpful and encouraging to remember in the midst of such times as that, that Scripture when it gives us this call to praise God for his past mercies, when it tells us in everything to give thanks, as 1 Thessalonians 5 does, "in everything to give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus," it is important to remember that alongside that, at the same time, that your God is a caring and sympathetic God for you in the midst of your discouragement, in the midst of your hard times; that God's tender mercy extends to you not only in delivering you from your past

sins, delivering you from condemnation into the grace of Christ, but there is an enduring attitude, an enduring disposition of God of grace and kindness and patience and love toward you that is unchanging because God himself is unchanging. The grace that motivated God to send Christ to the cross, the grace that motivated God to have the Spirit of God work in your heart and bring you to faith has not changed since you became a Christian. His grace is simply unfolding in greater ways. God's disposition toward you is still favorable, even though the clouds of providence may seem to have hidden the sun from your view. That's why even the Apostle Peter in the New Testament could say, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him." Why? "Because," what? "He cares for you." He cares for you. He cared for you when he saved you, whenever that was back in the earlier years of your life, and that care for you has not changed since then. He cared for you to save you, to bring you into his family that you would be called a child of God, and therefore enjoy his fatherly provision and protection. In addition to giving thanks to him, then, it is fitting, it is appropriate, you are welcome to come to him and to cast your troubles upon him, to cast your anxiety upon him, to cast your isolation, your discouragement, your despair, to cast it upon him with full confidence the God who loved you enough to save you in Christ, loves you still, loves you enough to receive that burden and to receive it sympathetically, to receive it in a way by which he intends to help you, not to push you away.

You see, I think one of the hardest things for new Christians to get through their minds in the midst of difficulty is this, is that the turn of providence against you, so to speak, when life becomes difficult, when the early days of glory on the other side of the Jordan River and everything seems so bright and promising suddenly turns to difficulty and reversal and discouragement and tears where joy had been before, it is easy to make a mistake of profound consequence and to interpret the change of circumstance as a change in the disposition of God toward you and, "Oh, I must have done something wrong. Somehow these circumstances indicate that God is no longer being merciful to me," and to interpret the circumstance as being an evidence of God's hostility toward you in a way that is not helpful. Yes, sometimes God disciplines his children when they stray. Yes, sometimes God disciplines us in order to prepare us for future ministry. Yes, sometimes we bear the consequences of our foolish choices. But beloved, you should not misinterpret that when the consequences come to interpret that as though God's fundamental disposition of love toward you has turned toward one of hostility. That's not the case. The loving father who corrects his son in his disobedience has not suddenly started to hate his son, he simply has an eye on the longer term needs, the longer term objectives that a time of painful discipline will afterwards yield into a peaceful fruit of righteousness.

So we always remember as Christians that God's fundamental disposition toward us was defined by the grace that was shown to us, the love that was shown to us at the cross of Calvary, and that he is using whatever has come into our lives in furtherance of those loving, gracious objectives. He hasn't suddenly changed and become your enemy. So we keep that in mind as we go through these trials and we turn our prayer for future mercies.

Now, what the Psalmist does here, Psalm 85, if you go back there to verse 4, the Psalmist is pleading with God to deal with his people now as he had done in the past in the verses that follow. He says, verse 4,

4 Restore us, O God of our salvation, And cause Your indignation toward us to cease. 5 Will You be angry with us forever? Will You prolong Your anger to all generations? 6 Will You not Yourself revive us again, That Your people may rejoice in You? 7 Show us Your lovingkindness, O LORD, And grant us Your salvation.

Now what's he saying here? This has been a prolonged time of chastisement for them and the severity of the daily difficulty had brought them to the brink of despair. It was as though – this is the key part here – it was as though God was angry with them. It was as though that he was going to be angry forever, as it says in verse 5. He lays forth these rhetorical questions, "God, is this just going to go on forever against us?" But you can see where his faith and his confidence reaches through the clouds of dark providence and reaches to the sunlight of the unchanging character of God toward his people. He says in verse 6, "Will You not Yourself revive us again, That Your people may rejoice in You?" "God, I know that You will do this in time, why let it go on any longer? God, revive us now so that we can rejoice again, so that this despair could give way to praise."

What he's asking for here, notice in verse 6. Actually, let's just step back a moment and review the context here and remember. Here they were, they were in captivity and what had God done? He showed kindness to them. He showed grace to them and he brought them out of the captivity. Now they have come back into another dark time. What's he praying here? What's he saying here? He says, "God," verse 6, look at it, "Will You not Yourself revive us again, That Your people may rejoice in You?" He's saying, "God, what You did in the past and Your unchanging character is the basis upon which I am now asking for further mercies here in this present situation. God, what I'm asking You to do is this, I'm asking You to revive us, I'm asking You to help us again just like You've done in the past. You've done this before, God. I know that You're merciful. I know that You're gracious. God, simply do it again. God, act upon us, act upon our circumstances just like You did in the past. Revive us again. Restore us again. Restore our fortunes so that we could return to that former joy."

What's the basis upon which he could ask for such mercy from God? It's not merit, "God, I deserve better than this." That's not the ground of the request. It's not even, although there are these strains in what he says, the ground of the prayer is not ultimately, "God, this is too much to bear." It's deeper than that. It's vertical, not horizontal. It's not based on something within him that deserves such action from God. On what basis does he ask for mercy from God? Look at it there with us in verse 7 when he says, "Show us Your lovingkindness, O LORD, And grant us Your salvation." He addresses him again by the name of Yahweh as he did in verse 1 and will do again in verse 8. Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God, the promise-keeping God to his people. "God, You are a promise-keeping God and, God, You are a God of lovingkindness. You are a God of," the Hebrew word is *chesed* here, "You are a God of loyal love. God, Your love toward Your people does not

change because You are a God whose love is loyal, it is faithful, it is unchanging, it is enduring. It does not rise and fall with circumstance."

So he is appealing to the loyal love of God as this basis for further mercies. By nature – hear me now – by nature, by essence, by fundamental character of attributes and perfections who God is, by his very essence God is faithful to his people. By his very essence he is disposed to extend kindness to them to alleviate their suffering. Isn't that what he did to you when you were suffering in sin? Suffering in darkness? Suffering under the darkness of legalistic religion and you were brought into the grace of Christ? Suffering under the bonds of an external religion that had no spiritual meaning and you just knelt and stood up and kissed the statues when they told you to and stuck your tongue out so the priest could put a little cracker on your mouth and tell you it was the body of Jesus and God delivered you from all of that? Wasn't he kind to you back then when he did that? Wasn't he kind to you, some of the others of you, to open your eyes to the fact that you weren't really a Christian at all? God graciously showed you that you were a false convert and he led you gently to true repentance and received you in mercy as you confessed your sins and received Christ for your salvation, wasn't he like that to you?

Well, don't you see that when he showed you that kind of faithfulness to alleviate your spiritual and physical suffering in the past, that he hasn't changed? He doesn't change. That love that initiated salvation to you at the first is a love that is born out of eternal loyalty to God's elect, to God's chosen, and when he saved you, he saved you with the purpose to show you this love forever without change, without alteration.

Let me remind you of what it says in the book of Romans 8 after Paul unfolds the full glories of salvation and shows how the redemptive work of Christ was the answer to the wrath of God that was on sinners and that God is now at work in his people to sanctify them in a work that he will complete and one day bring us into glory. Look at Romans 8:35 then. You see, we just really need to sink the roots of our mind deeply into the loyal love of God, the unchanging nature of our God. When he saved us, he saved us forever. He saved us to bless us forever and, sure, the circumstances may fluctuate along the way in this brief window of life, but God's fundamental disposition toward you has not changed and it never could change because God himself would have to change for that to happen and God is an unchanging God. He is immutable. He is not like us. He does not fluctuate with the changing circumstances of time and Paul makes this clear in Romans 8:35, he says, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Verse 37, "in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who," what? "Who loved us." And he says, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God's love toward you, fellow Christian, is loyal. It is unchanging. It is a rock upon which you can stand. And that unchanging love, therefore, gives you the basis upon which to appeal to him to deal with you in mercy in the midst of your affliction, and

when you appeal to him not on the basis of anything good that you have done but rather you appeal to him and the basis of your appeal is, "God, be merciful to me here. God, show me Your love here. Manifest Your loyalty to me in these barren circumstances," you can know that he will receive that prayer well because you're appealing to the very thing that motivated him to save you in the first place and you are appealing based on his word to the fact that God himself has said his love toward you will never change.

Now I ask you, is that not much much different? First of all, I ask you isn't this just really evident on the pages of Scripture that this is who God is and this is the way that he acts? And I ask you isn't it better to root your thinking about God in what he has revealed than the way that you feel about your circumstances? Isn't it better to interpret your circumstances through the lens of Scripture rather than letting your circumstances be the lens through which you interpret God? Of course your circumstances are going to change. Of course your finances are going to come and go. Of course your health is going to come and go and the older you get, the more it's going to go. Gravity and decay have a way of winning. They're batting about 1,000 over the course of humanity. And if you interpret that natural result of the fall as being an evidence of God's hostility toward you, you have set yourself up for a fairly miserable spiritual existence. It's doomed to fail sooner or later because sooner or later trouble is going to catch up with us, sooner or later the pain of a heart attack is going to hit you and then what? Then what happens? Then what do you turn to?

There is a much better way to think about your Lord, there's a much better way to think about your gracious God, there's a much better way to think about it all is to realize that his love and his grace and his mercy are an unchanging disposition toward you. He is favorably disposed toward you and, yes, it's hard to keep our minds around that. Yes, it's hard to keep our feet planted on that fertile soil that is good for us. Beloved, that's why the Apostle Paul had to pray for the Ephesians. Look at Ephesians 3:4. After Paul had done a far more masterful job of expounding the grace of God in salvation than anything I would ever do in the course of 100 lifetimes if the Lord gave them to me, after he has unpacked the wonders of salvation, he says in verse 14, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name." He's praying for his readers and he's saying, "I pray that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love," not of a horizontal nature, the love of a vertical nature that God has showered upon his true people. So I pray in verse 18, that you would "be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." He says, "I'm praying for you to understand the vast ocean, the infinite breadth and depth of this ocean of the love of God that is written on the skies and that is written in the scars and written in the wounds of your crucified and risen Savior, and to realize that that manifestation of the love of God in Christ is evidence to you that His love will never change, that His grace is greater than your sin, that His love is deeper than all of your circumstances combined could ever contradict," and the prayer of Paul is that you would somehow grasp that so that you would be strong in your inner man and

that you would be confident in the favorable disposition of God toward you no matter what might come in life.

That, beloved, is what it is like to appeal to the loyal love of God. "God, I remember Christ. I remember the cross of Calvary. I remember Your promises of heaven and the love which drew me into salvation's plan. Lord, that love is what I appeal to as I ask You to alleviate and to help me in the midst of my present suffering." And when you appeal to God on the basis of the merit and the love of his Son, your appeal is well-grounded and well-received in the courts of heaven.

So coming back to Psalm 85, as he says, "Show us Your lovingkindness, grant us Your salvation," this is illustrating the critical spiritual attitudes of humility and trust. Beloved, do you see that when you pray in this manner of which we've been speaking this evening, do you see that this is a manifestation of trust in God, a confidence in his revealed character, that what God has done in Christ provokes in you a spiritual response that says, "Lord, I will depend on this. I trust this. I have confidence in this. I believe You. I trust You for what You have said in Christ, what You have done, and I trust You even though everything about my life screams at me that it is time to abandon that place of confidence, God. I look beyond that. I look to Your character. I look to Your loyal love. I see it, so to speak, in the face of my Savior and I will rest my confidence there, and it's on the basis of who You are that I approach You." So his plea is not, "I don't deserve this," in a spiteful angry way, rather his plea is one of dependence, "God, I ask You for this simply because You're merciful. Simply because You are who You are, God, I ask You for mercy." In that way, it reminds us of the tax collector in Luke 18 who stood apart from the proud Pharisee. Do you remember how he prayed? "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." Our prayer is never, "God, I don't deserve this," our prayer is, "God, You're merciful. Be merciful to me, the sinner."

So you can see as you go through these first seven verses of Psalm 85, you can see the momentum building for his renewed faith. "I remember Your past mercies. I remember who You are as I plead for future mercy. God," here it is, this is the way that you are to think, beloved, this is the way a Christian's heart is to operate, this is the way the control center of everything that animates the way that you approach all of life is to be activated, "God, You have been faithful to me in the past, You have been good to me in the past. You are unchanging and, therefore, I know that You're faithful still. I know that You're loving still. I know that You're merciful still. And on that basis, Father, I believe that my present sorrows cannot be the end of the story. This cannot end in sorrow and despair, even though it's what I'm feeling right now. So, God, as I slog through another difficult day of temptation and failure and adversity, God, I look beyond it. I remember in my heart, I apply my faith and I express my hope and confidence in You as I pray."

That leads us to the third point here in this Psalm, and we could say it this way, I mean, all of these things tend to overlap but there is this trust for future peace, not just for a change of circumstance but a trust for future peace. The Psalmist now turns to God's word after his prayer in verse 8 and he says,

8 I will hear what God the LORD will say; For He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones; But let them not turn back to folly. 9 Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, That glory may dwell in our land.

Now rather than discouragement, he is marked by a hopeful expectancy. He speaks in the first person singular and says, "I will hear from God." What he's saying here is this, is that the faithfulness of God that he has been cultivating through these first seven verses, the faithfulness of God means this and true for all of us in all of our adversity even if it is delayed until we see Christ in heaven, the faithfulness of God, beloved, means this for certain to you in your adversity, the faithfulness of God means that there must be a turning point of some kind at some time for sure, of some kind at some time. We don't know in advance and we should not be so foolish as to try to define it in advance as what God must do to show his kindness and mercy to us. It may take a completely different form than what we expect but his faithfulness means that you are never going to be completely abandoned to your despair and discouragement.

You could say as I would have said a long time ago in the midst of a different kind of adversity, "But God, this has been going on for so long! This has been going on for years and it hasn't changed!" If that's you tonight, then I would just say to you that the length of time of your despair does nothing to diminish, qualify or contradict the faithfulness of God to you. This is something that is outside of time and God understands that it's been long, God understands that the night has gotten very dark for you, but the passage of time has nothing to do with the unchanging essence of the loyal love of God toward his people, and if it's really really dark, then all that means is that somehow light is going to come in the morning, and I can't tell you when the morning is going to come, when the first rays of dawn will spark again on your discouraged dark soul, dark just in the sense of discouragement, a true Christian soul is not dark when it's indwelt by the Holy Spirit, of course, but beloved, the length of time says nothing about the ability or the intention of God to bring a turning point of some kind at some time, and when he does, it will be worth waiting for.

I truly believe that the darker and the longer the night is for God's children will be met by an even greater and asymmetrical measure of grace in response because this is just the way the character of God is. If you have experienced a flood of sorrow, I would expect in time a flood of grace in response because that's just how good God is, right? What you want the aspiration of your heart and soul to be in the midst of such times is you want to cling to the character of God and you want to persevere so that you can see that blessing on the other side and like Jacob who wrestled with God, you grab hold, so to speak, you grab hold of his unchanging loyal love and you grab hold of that and with a sanctified insistence you say, "God, I will not let go of You. I will not let go of my confidence in Your loyal love until You bless me.

Now, as he uses the word "salvation" here in verse 9, "Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him," salvation here includes an idea of present deliverance as well as the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. You can see this because there is an earthly dimension to the nature of his prayer which would be appropriate for a Jew who associated the land

that God had given to Abraham with the blessing of God. So in Psalm 85:1, "O LORD, You showed favor to Your land." Verse 9, "Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, That glory may dwell in our land." Verse 12, "Indeed, the LORD will give what is good, And our land will yield its produce." He's emphasizing the land and so in the context of Psalm 85, he's expecting a restoration to be brought to the land in which God had brought his people to live but the greater point for this evening, for us today some 2,500 years after this Psalm was written, the greater thing that I would encourage you to keep your focus on is this, is to follow the spiritual pattern that he's using. The spiritual pattern. In his trials, he remembered God's past mercy. That motivated him to confidence to pray for further mercies and until God acts, he will wait with an expectant faith, not simply – oh, beloved, understand that this is not simply maintaining a stiff upper lip, a stiff cold resolve that, "I'm going to stand and I'll play the part of a man no matter how hard this gets." No, no, no, that's not what we're talking about here. We're not talking about a cold stoicism, what we're talking about is a warmhearted, well-grounded faith and confidence that God will act toward you in accordance with the perfect, unchanging, loyal love that he has shown you from the beginning of your spiritual life. Of course he will. It could be no other way.

What does that lead to? Point 4: a peace of present faith. A peace of present faith. Look at verses 10 through 13 as we bring this plane in for a landing.

10 Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. 11 Truth springs from the earth, And righteousness looks down from heaven.

Look at his confidence. Look at his peace.

12 Indeed, the LORD will give what is good, And our land will yield its produce. 13 Righteousness will go before Him And will make His footsteps into a way.

He's so grounded in the character of God: his loyal love, his truth, his righteousness, his peace. Verse 11, truth, righteousness. Verse 12, good. Verse 13, righteousness. He's come to a crescendo of faith and confidence even though as he writes this – mark this – as he writes this his circumstances have not yet changed. He's speaking future tense here. He's talking about what will happen and he's satisfied in what will happen even though the present circumstances have not been altered because the loyal love of God, the truth of God, the righteousness of God means that God will provide a comprehensive peace in time. By peace meaning not simply a subjective sense of things but a complete well-being, "A fullness of well-being will mark my life in God's time. This present conflict will give way to a righteous harmony because God's perfections, His attributes of righteousness and mercy are always in harmony. He will bring peace between heaven and earth. He will bring peace to my heart. He will bring a harmony to it all."

What we're talking about here informs the entire way that we view the world. What we're talking about here, what's revealed here in Psalm 85 defines our understanding of what

the outcome of everything will be. God's righteousness will be displayed one day with perfect integrity to his revealed character and in absolute justice. We as his people will one day know perfect spiritual and physical well-being. God by his righteousness will surely advance his kingdom even if it seems that the progress has been stalled or is being reversed by what's happening the world around us. God's program is never reversed. His progress is never stalled by the actions of men. The great wickedness of our present culture has done nothing to hinder the out-workings of the purposes of God. For Israel, they will know this peace in the still future millennial kingdom but we don't have to wait until then to see God's glory, beloved, because in Scripture in the Lord Jesus Christ God's glory was brought down to earth. In John 1:14 it says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth." And in the perfect embodiment of righteousness and peace, our Lord Jesus achieved reconciliation for everyone who believes at the cross.

Beloved, don't you see? Don't you see? Don't you see? Don't you believe? Don't you trust? Don't you rest in the fact that if God sent Christ and Christ is who he is, and Christ did what he did in offering himself as a substitute sacrifice for your sin, don't you see that he was gracious then? Don't you see that because he is unchanging, he's gracious now? Don't you see that that means that he will be gracious again in the future? Don't you see that that means that he is going to be gracious to us forever and evermore? It could be no other way. Nothing will separate us from that love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So my dear brothers and sisters, I ask you: has God been kind to you in Christ? Has he truly redeemed you? Give him thanks. Has he helped you in the past in life even though you have difficulties where you're waiting for that help to come right now? Hasn't he helped you in the past in life? Give glory to him for that no matter what today is like. Beloved, don't you see as I've been saying all along tonight, does not his past kindness to you give you an indication that in the days to come he'll show you kindness again? Your present adversity isn't the final word on life, it couldn't be, so don't let it define your thinking that way. Ask him for it. He gives in response to our prayers. Is your answer delayed at the moment? Trust him. Trust him enough to expect that he'll give you the answer you need in time.

Let's pray together.

Father, we have gathered together this evening as nothing more than the lambs of Christ in need of the care of our Shepherd. Sometimes it seems perhaps outside the fold where danger lurks and nighttime sets and we bleat, as it were, from our uncertain and unsettled hearts. Father, surely there are many who have come into the room this evening, tuned in over the live stream, in exactly that spiritual condition. O gracious Christ, the Christ of Calvary, the Christ of coming glory, the Christ of our salvation, the great Shepherd of the sheep, may You take these lambs and remind them of the care that is embodied in Your hands that hold them; that the hands that hold their future are hands of loyal love, hands of perfect mercy, hands that never fail, strong hands whose grip upon our lives can never be loosened not even by Satan himself. Yes, dear Lamb of God, we are in Your hands. We commit ourselves to You. We thank You for the past mercies

that You have shown to us. We thank You for the present mercies even if they are hidden for a time from our view. We thank You for the grace that You have yet to unfold to us in the future.

So mindful of Your loyal love, mindful of Your immutable character, mindful of Your perfect grace, Your perfect wisdom, dear Father, I commend each one to You and pray that the unfolding of Your mercy and grace in their lives would be a cause for great praise for each one that knows You. And for those, Father, who have still yet to bend the knee, may the display of the love of God that has been shown from Your word here this evening, may Your kindness lead them to a true repentance that they might, at last, finally come to the Christ that they have heard proclaimed so many times. May You work with a special measure and depth of grace in this hour in the hearts of those who have yet to believe, to open them to the wonders of the love and mercy of Christ that they might be drawn to Him to confess their sins, to receive Him as Lord, to give themselves over to Christ completely, forsaking the world, forsaking sin, forsaking everything of this life in exchange for that great pearl, that great wonder, the great surpassing value of Jesus Christ Himself. In those thoughts, Father, we close with gratitude. We thank You for the endless mercies that are ours in Christ. Amen.

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