

Restore Us, O God

Scripture Text: Psalm 80

Introduction

Christmas is almost here. We will be celebrating and remembering the earthly birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. For us today, Christmas is a time for us to remember what God has already given us through His Son and our Savior. It is a time to celebrate the hope, joy and peace we all have through Jesus Christ. But consider this, there was a time before Christ came when the people were longing for salvation. There was a time when people were longing for a Savior to come. What was it like before Jesus arrived? What was it like for God's people before God finally, at the right moment in history, sent His Son to be born as a baby boy? God had promised to send a Savior for a very long time. All the way back in Genesis, God told His people that He would one day send them a Savior. That was a very long time ago. What did the world do? The first verse of the Christmas hymn *O Holy Night* speaks of the world waiting for Jesus to come.

*Long lay the world, in sin and error pining
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth*

That verse from *O Holy Night* says that the world was longing for its Savior for a long time, while suffering under the bondage of sin. The story of God's people is one of waiting for a Savior. The story of God's people is one of repeated petitions for God to save them. The story of God's people is one of repeated events of them turning away from God, enduring the painful consequences of their unfaithfulness, and then calling out to God for help. It is a cycle that we repeat today: turn away from God, endure pain and hardship, repent and turn back to God. We bring a lot of suffering on ourselves! Psalm 80 is a lament from His people where they have received some harsh treatment from others and they have asked God to save them. We see in this psalm a plea for God to deliver His people from the oppression of an enemy. This is similar to the world's desire to be saved from sin, suffering and death through the advent of a Savior.

The Lord is Our Shepherd

What are some ways we think of God? Creator? King? Judge? Probably one of the most common ways to think of God is as our heavenly Father. That is how Jesus taught us to address God in our prayers, "Our Father" (Matthew 6:9). Psalm 80 is a prayer that opens with another familiar address to God. The psalmist called God, "Shepherd". Although this title appears elsewhere in scripture, the idea of God being a Shepherd occurs only twice in the Psalms. It occurs in Psalm 23 (The Lord is my Shepherd) and in this psalm. Look at the first verse of Psalm 80.

Psalm 80:1–2 ¹ Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. ² Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up your might and come to save us!

The psalmist declared God as the Shepherd of Israel. For God to be a Shepherd means that He must have sheep. I do not know much about keeping sheep, but I believe they need to be led. They need to be fed. They need to be protected. For God to be a Shepherd implies that His people are His sheep who need His leadership, His help, and His protection. Being their Shepherd also shows God's intimate relationship with His people as their Provider and their Protector. The situation underlying this prayer is that God's people have gone astray (again!) and have been attacked by "wolves" who would like to devour them. The psalmist remembered the times God saved Israel and led them in the past, such as when He saved them from their oppression in Egypt and when He led them into the Promised Land (vss. 8-9). Recalling how God had helped His ancestors in the past, the psalmist called upon the Shepherd of Israel to save His people again. They were in a bad situation and needed His help and to be led to safety.

Not only was God Israel's Shepherd, He is our Shepherd, too. That may not sound flattering to some people. Many people today may not want to admit it, but we too, are like sheep that have gone astray. We, too, are like sheep that need to be led, protected and provided for. We, too, are like sheep that wander from the fold, get lost, and are attacked by dangerous predators. The good news of the Gospel, however, is that we have a Shepherd who cares so much for us, that He died for us. Jesus called Himself the "Good Shepherd" who came to earth in order to save His sheep and to bring all of His sheep into one fold. Look at the following verses.

John 10:14, 16 ¹⁴ *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me...*
¹⁶ *And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

Like God of the Old Testament, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows His flock and leads them to the Promised Land. God cared so much for His sheep, that He sent His one and only Son to die for them. At this time of the year, we celebrate the advent of Jesus Christ, the coming of our Savior. God sent His one and only Son as a little baby boy born in a little town of Bethlehem in order to shepherd His people. God came to us through His Son, Jesus, in order to save us from the greatest enemy, death. Jesus came to earth in order to defeat death, to give us eternal life, and to lead us to the Promised Land, our home in heaven. Is Jesus your Shepherd?

The Lord Restores Our Lives

The main emphasis of Psalm 80 is for God to restore His people. For something to be restored, though, it must be in a state that is not natural or not in the way that was originally intended. It must be in a condition that is worn or broken. To restore something is to put it in its original state, with no defects or imperfections. We see people restoring things such as houses, cars, and furniture. Even works of art are sometimes restored to their original beauty because they have deteriorated over time. Something we notice with this psalm is its refrain, "Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!" This statement, or a variation of it, is mentioned *three times* within the psalm, in verses 3, 7, and 19. Look at the following verses.

Psalm 80:3–7 ³ Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved! ⁴ O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? ⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. ⁶ You make us an object of contention for our neighbors, and our enemies laugh among themselves. ⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved!

Houses, cars and works of art are not the only things needing restoration. People need restoration, too. The psalmist called out in distress to the Shepherd of Israel, because Israel's relationship with God was damaged. It was not what it needed to be. God was angry with His people because they have been unfaithful to Him, and as a result, they had brought sorrow upon themselves. God's face seems to have been turned away from them. The prayer that God make His face shine upon the people is that God might show favor to them again. The psalmist may have heard Aaron's blessing many times from Exodus 6:22-27. So he prayed here, "Make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved". We know God did not always smile favorably on Israel, and we know the reason why. God's people did not repent of their sins and did not truly seek after God and His righteousness. Restoration is not automatic. God is good—He is the Good Shepherd—but He requires repentance, a turning away from sin. In fact, "restore us" can mean, "turn us again". The psalmist wanted God to turn His people back to Him.

Likewise, the psalmist prayed that God would also "turn" Himself and help His people. The psalmist prayed that God would act by coming to His people and saving them from their oppressors. Israel desperately needed Him to turn back to them, smile on them favorably, and to rescue them from the destruction that was going to take place. We know their situation was serious as the Northern Kingdom, Israel, was eventually defeated by Assyrians and the Southern Kingdom, Judah, was eventually destroyed by the Babylonians. Therefore, the psalmist prayed for God to empower someone to help them. In verse seventeen, the psalmist referred to God empowering "the man of your right hand" and "the son of man". Look at the following verse.

Psalm 80:17–19 ¹⁷ But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself! ¹⁸ Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name! ¹⁹ Restore us, O Lord God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!

The "man of your right hand" and "the son of man" probably refer to the people of Israel. Israel as a whole was called God's "son". They were the specially chosen people of God who made a covenant with them. This prayer was for God to restore their relationship, for God to make them strong against their enemies, and for God to give them favor. Israel faced some very difficult times, and much of it was brought on by their own unfaithfulness. The psalmist prayed for God to forgive Israel's sin and to turn Israel back to Him. While Israel is God's son in this psalm, we read elsewhere in scripture of another fulfillment of a man at God's right hand and the Son of Man. When Jesus was born, He fulfilled the true Son of God and the true Son of Man who later sat down at

God's right hand. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness for God's people and was the Savior and Shepherd that the world had longed to see. Jesus fulfilled what Israel could not.

Do You Need to be Restored?

Do you need to be restored? Is your life in turmoil? Actually, we are all born in turmoil. We have turmoil thrust upon us. We even bring turmoil upon ourselves. From the moment we are born into this world, we are separated from God by sin. Our relationship with Him is damaged by our own selfish desires and our own attempts to be "Master of the Universe", a title that belongs only to God. God restores us to our previous state through His Son, Jesus Christ. However, the first step to being restored and having your life fixed is to acknowledge your situation. You cannot fix what you do not acknowledge. The next step is knowing how to *be fixed*. We have to give up trying to fix ourselves. If we could fix ourselves, then Jesus did not need to come to die for you. If you are perfect and sinless and believe you have done nothing wrong, then Jesus did not need to come to die for you. But, if your relationship with God is damaged, like the rest of mankind, and you need to be restored, the good news of the Gospel is that there is a Shepherd who came to restore, to provide and to protect His people. Do you want God to restore you and to bring you back into fellowship with Him? That is what it means for Jesus to be our Savior. God saves us, restores us, turns us back to Him, so that we will be in fellowship with Him. He wants a relationship with you.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the truth is that all of us are in trouble and need a Savior. We are all perishing, but the good news is that God has provided the Way for us to be rescued. His name is Jesus Christ! God so loved the world that He sent His only Son in order to rescue us from damnation. Just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were powerless to save themselves from the fiery furnace in Babylon, we are also powerless to save ourselves from eternal separation from God. And yet, God has provided the rescue. Hundreds of years after the circumstance of Psalm 80 and the Jewish exile in Babylon, God came to earth, to a little town in Bethlehem, to dwell as a little baby in a manger. God came to be with His creation in order to rescue His people. God is with us through Jesus. He is our Immanuel — *God with us!* Jesus is our Shepherd, He is with us, and He restores us through the cross of Christ. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!