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The Hope of Every Nation

Psalm 85

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“I’m hungry!” That is a very common phrase at my house—with three teenagers, one who is about to be, and two little ones who only speak when they are hungry. Food just disappears out of our home. Loaves of bread, gallons of milk and buckets of ice cream just disappear. I can’t tell you how many nights Donna and I have been woken up at midnight to hear some banging cupboard or freezer door slamming shut. Somebody has gone for more food—one more bowl of ice cream or one more box of cereal. It just goes on and on.

I am hungry. I am not hungry for food, at least not right now. But I am hungry for more of God. There is a hunger in my own spirit and soul that wants to know Him and walk with Him in ways that I haven’t yet. Oh, I have tasted. I have experienced some of what it is to be near to God and to know Him. But there is a hunger in my soul to know Him more.

Actually, maybe it is a little bit more like homesickness. Have you ever been homesick? You go off to camp and everything you see and do reminds you of what you are missing at home. I would not be a very good world traveler. I couldn’t do the “Jeff Peterson three-week trip to India.” I would be a basket case after about four or five days. I just want to be home. You know, there is that gnawing, wanting to be with the ones you love and to give them a hug. There is a longing to smell the smells of home and be surrounded by that security that you so long for and appreciate. Somewhere between hunger and homesickness is the way I would describe that yearning in my own soul and spirit.

We are told in ancient creed that there is a God-shaped hole, vacuum, or hunger in the heart of every human being that only God can fill. It is a hunger that is evident throughout our culture across our nation. People are desperately trying to fill up the hole. They are hungering for something that would give them satisfaction or peace of mind. They have rightly diagnosed that there is something missing, but they have listened to and taken the prescription of the culture. There are all kinds of things that are offered to try to fill up the hole. They are really poison pills; they are not the right prescription. If there were a pharmacist in Lincoln who gave a poison to somebody instead of the right medicine, that pharmacy would be shut down just like that. Of course, you and I would never think of going there to have a prescription filled. Yet people in our culture stand in line to take the prescriptions for what will fill the void in their life, even though it is never satisfying, never the right thing. That hunger and the craving to fill it with the wrong things reaches every corner of our culture from the young to the old, the rich to the poor, the great and the small.

It is out there and yes, unfortunately, it is in here. Because too many times I find in my own heart that I am looking for other things besides God that will fill the hole in my own life. I have diagnosed that I am hungry, but I have turned to things that don’t satisfy.

God has been faithful and said to His people from the very first time he called Abraham, “I will be your God. I will be your satisfier. I will meet your need. I will fill the longing. I will be there always for you.” Through all of time, God has been the constant, faithful, unchanging one whose invitation is always open to you and me to come, drink, be filled and satisfied.

But the experience of God’s people has been much more like a roller coaster. It is not really a thrill ride. It is more a ride of terror. There are times where God’s people draw near and experience fullness and satisfaction. Then they begin to look around, and the enticements of the world and prescriptions offered seem to be maybe a better thing. So they begin to experiment with those things

and turn away from God. Their lives begin to descend into the pit, until they come to a point of desperation where they are about to be destroyed and they turn back to God and cry out. He restores them again. We are a fickle people, the people of God.

That was the life of Israel. That was the life of God's chosen people. Psalm 85, which we are going to look at today, is their cry for restoration at one of those low points when they had come to the end. Psalm 85 is one of the later psalms. It was written after they had been sent off into Babylonian captivity and then had come back. They already had experienced God's judgment for their sin. They already had been brought low. They had repented and come back. But now they find themselves in the same position again.

In the first three verses of Psalm 85, the psalmist recalls what God has done for them in the past, and that He has been the one to restore them. Notice he says:

**O LORD, You showed favor to Your land; You restored the captivity of Jacob.
You forgave the iniquity of Your people; You covered all their sin. Selah. You
withdrew all Your fury; You turned away from Your burning anger.** (vs. 1-3, *NASB)

The word "favor" in the first line means delight. God showed delight to His land. That included not just the land, but the people. The people and the land. In Israel's case, those two went together—the land of Israel and the people of God. God delighted in His people. He turned His delight towards them and He restored them.

We all know what restoration is. Some of you restore cars and old furniture and houses. It is bringing something back to its original luster, its original condition. God was delighted to restore His people back to wholeness, back to health. He forgave their iniquity and covered all their sin. Notice that He didn't just forgive some of their sin, but all their sin. Not only the sin, but the word "iniquity" there really relates to the guilt because of their sin. He removed the guilt and the sin from their lives and He withdrew all of His fury. He turned away from His burning anger.

Sometimes we struggle with God's anger. We like to think of God as a God of love. Why is God angry with sin? Why does He hate it? We are told that God is a jealous God. He is jealous for His people. That is not a jealousy like you and I would experience jealousy. When I am jealous of someone, it is because I have a hole or need in my life and I am thinking the other person needs to be giving their attention to me. God is not jealous like that. He does not need anything from us. God's jealousy is the kind of jealousy you have for somebody you love and you want the best for them. When they settle for something less, something different or something that will hurt them or destroy them, you are angry and you are jealous. You want them to come back and experience wholeness and fullness again. God does whatever He can to bring about enough discomfort, enough pain, in our life to get us to turn around and cry out and ask for help, so that we can be restored and get back on the path of life.

God had removed His wrath. Notice every phrase begins with "You, O Lord." All the work was done *by God*. "You restored, You forgave, You covered, You withdrew, and You turned." If there is going to be a restoration in your life or my life, it is going to be *God's* work. It is not something I can produce on my own. And the people of Israel knew that. They cried out to God, and God met them and then restored them. That was their history.

These verses are a fulfillment of a promise that God made to Solomon when the temple was dedicated in Jerusalem. We don't often do this, but if you would turn back to 2 Chronicles chapter 6, we see the prayer that Solomon prayed. They built this magnificent temple for God and they are

dedicating it. It is an incredible scene, an incredible portion of Scripture, and I encourage you to read it and think about it. This is the prayer that Solomon prayed on that dedication. Look at verse 24 of 2 Chronicles 6. Solomon is worried that the people will sin and fail because they have such a history of doing it. So he prays:

“If Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and they return to You and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication before You in this house, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You have given to them and to their fathers.” (vs. 24-25)

He goes through several more instances of the kinds of things that could happen to them. Look down in verse 29:

Whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man or by all Your people Israel, each knowing his own affliction and his own pain, and spreading his hands toward this house, then hear from heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know for You alone know the hearts of the sons of men, that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways as long as they live in the land which You have given to our fathers. (vs. 29-31)

Solomon prays, “God if we fail, if we sin and we confess it to You, will You restore us? Will You renew us or will You turn Your back on us forever?” He is asking God to be the restoring and reviving God—even before they failed—because he knew that it would happen. God responded to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7 beginning in verse 12:

Then the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, “I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place.”

(2 Chronicles 7:12-15)

That was God’s promise to His people: that if they would confess their sin, if they would acknowledge their need for His restoring work, He would hear. His ears were going to be open and His eyes would be open; He would see, hear, respond and restore them as a people. God had done it. He had brought them back from captivity.

That is what Psalm 85 is rejoicing over. “You did it, God. *You* brought us back. *You* restored us.” But now they are facing another situation like that. Their sin again has overwhelmed them and they are feeling the consequences of it.

In Psalm 85, verses 4-7, they plead for God’s restoration again.

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

To put it in our language, what the psalmist is saying and the people of God are saying is, “Do it again. We need Your intervention again. We need You to restore us again and to bring us back to

the place where we were as Your people.” They asked Him to remove this indignation and anger and not to prolong it, but to cut it short and end it. “We are confessing. We are acknowledging that we need You, so please stop being angry with us. Stop judging us for our sin.” Verse 6 says, “Will You not Yourself revive us again?”

We all understand reviving: the picture of somebody whose life is slipping away and somebody comes and performs CPR and breathes life back into a body. That is the picture here of God breathing life back into His people who are slipping away. “God, will You not Yourself (don’t send somebody else but You, Yourself, God, our God) come and revive us? Breathe new life back into us again that we might rejoice in You again. Show us Your lovingkindness. Show us Your mercy and grant us Your deliverance, Your salvation.”

That is the cry of God’s people when they recognize their sinfulness and how far they have strayed off the path. There are many of you (myself included) who have prayed for that kind of revival. We have prayed that God would do a work in other people’s lives and that God would turn the hearts of other people back to Himself. We all know people that we probably have prayed for and said, “God, do a restoring work in them.”

I can think of a lot of other people who need revival. But verse 8 just absolutely stops me dead in my tracks, because what was a corporate prayer—“God, restore us, do a work in us”—suddenly becomes a lone voice. It is your voice and it is my voice, confronted by our own sin and fallenness, confronted by the destruction that we face when we wander away from God. Verse 8 says:

I will hear what God the LORD will say; For He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones...

Suddenly I am confronted with the fact that if there is going to be a change among God’s people, it has to begin right here in my heart. So many times in my own praying and living, I do a lot of talking. I do a lot of asking. I do a lot of begging. My time with God is too many times all *my* talking. The psalmist says, “I will *listen*. I will *hear*.” Be still and hear what God wants to say. That word “hear” means to give undivided listening attention.

We all know the difference between divided and undivided listening attention, right? Divided attention is when a wife is trying to communicate to her husband as he is flipping through the channels. He just says, “Uh-huh...uh-huh...uh-uh.” That is divided listening attention. Men, you don’t even realize sometimes you have authorized purchases of major things. You weren’t paying attention. I will be working away at my computer and the kids will be talking to me. I am saying, “Uh-huh.” Then I will say, “Where did they go?” “Well, you said they could go to so and so’s house.” That is divided listening attention.

But what I need and what you need is to give our full and undivided attention to hear God and to know the voice of God. Where and how does God want to speak to us? First and foremost, He wants to speak to us in His Word, for this reveals His very heart. It is powerful and life-changing. They are not just words like words of any other book. They are the words of life. They are the words that open our hearts to experience an intimacy and oneness with God that cannot be attained any other way. It is in these pages that Jesus meets us and we meet Him. We enter by faith into a relationship. He begins to fill us up and teach us and show us more of Himself, but we have to have undivided attention to listen.

I am not talking about the five or ten-minute quiet time, where you check it off your list because you spent time with God today as just one of the necessities. No, I am talking more about what the

psalmist said in Psalm 1—that they would meditate on His Word day and night. To so tune our ears and so long in our hearts to be filled up with the One who satisfies that we give our full, undivided, ongoing attention to hear Him—that is the hunger that God is stirring in my own heart to listen and to hear.

I need to listen for the voice of God to hear what He wants to do in my life and what He wants to say to me. It says in verse 8 that He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones—to the ones who will listen. To the ones who have ears to hear, God wants to speak peace. He wants to speak wholeness and tranquility and satisfaction into your life. He wants to fill you up, in other words. He wants to make that which is empty full and complete.

But I have to give my undivided attention. I have to stop and ask myself: How much time in comparison do I give to listening to God, as opposed to all the other things that I listen to? How many times is my prescription for my tiredness, my weariness at the end of the day, to come home and plop down in front of the television and before I know it, two or three hours have passed. But we give God fifteen minutes: “You’d better speak quick, God. I’ve got things to do.”

Or sometimes the hunger and longing in my heart I think will be filled up with food, or drink, or sex. Those things don’t satisfy. But will I give my undivided attention, so that I can hear the voice of one who wants to speak peace to His godly ones?

What would that look like if you and I began to live that way? What would happen in our families, in our church, in our community, in our nation if each and every one of us said, “The revival that needs to happen among God’s people needs to begin with me, and I will listen and hear and draw near to God”?

Verses 9 through 13 give us a taste of what it might look like and what it would be like. It is a description of what that kind of revival and restoration looks like among God’s people.

Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Lovingkindness and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth springs from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. Indeed, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its produce. Righteousness will go before Him and will make His footsteps into a way.

(vs. 9-13)

The psalmist is painting a picture of what it would be like among us if God was reigning supreme in every one of our lives. First of all, God’s glory would dwell in the land. God’s glory is His splendor, His majesty. It is the thing that God most longs for people on earth to know—His glory. Everything He does, He does for His own glory. God wants to display that which is most magnificent, which is His own character. There would be this sense of God’s presence and moving and glory in the land. There would be no question that God is at work here because there would be an awareness of His glory.

Then the attributes that once belonged only to God, lovingkindness, truth, righteousness and peace, meet together. They are here on earth present. Truth that springs up from the earth and righteousness looks down from heaven. In other words, all that is true of what is going on in heaven, all the righteousness and truth that happens in heaven, would also be happening here on earth. They all meet together; it is all one. It really is the fulfillment of what Jesus told His disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Ultimately these four verses (vs. 10-13) will be fulfilled in what we call the millennial reign of Christ, the 1,000-year reign. At the end of time, Christ will come physically to this earth and rule and reign for 1,000 years. The descriptions throughout Scripture include things like the lion lying with the lamb and beating swords into plowshares. This kind of peace and righteousness and truth will reign in all the earth for 1,000 years. That will be something!

But when I am restored and revived, I can experience those things in my life. Righteousness and peace and truth can meet in my life. When God's people collectively cry out to Him and draw near to Him, those things can happen in our community, in our body, and they can happen in God's people anywhere, any place in any nation. God so wants to do an amazing work in our lives. He so much wants us to be satisfied and filled up with Him. He so much wants to be supreme in all things. But I must come and ask Him to do His restoring, reviving work. There are times when we wonder if that could ever happen again. Could we ever see that kind of revival and renewal in our own country?

It has happened several times in the past. The first Great Awakening happened in the 1700s when there was an incredible moving of God's Spirit among the people of this land. Thousands upon thousands of people were converted. It was said that people would walk with their families up to ten or twelve miles in the burning sun to hear the Word because they wanted to become Christians. People would sell their clothing and anything they could to support a preacher to come to their area and share the gospel. Between 1700 and 1740, at the heart of this first Great Awakening, 75 to 80% of all people in the colonies attended church regularly. There was a hunger and a thirst to know God. It was that hunger and thirst that had an incredible, indelible impact on our founding fathers. They understood, because they had experienced in the colonies and in their own lives that there was a need for Christ to be at the center of an individual's life. If this nation, built of the people and by the people would survive, it required a people whose hearts were God's. It would not work if they weren't walking with God.

Although they never instituted but rather opposed a national religion, they constantly in every way they could encouraged and fostered people to draw near to God. Time after time after time, Congress would give proclamations for prayer, fasting and public humiliation of saying, "Seek God. Confess your sins." They encouraged the revivals.

Actually, from 1800 until after the Civil War, there was a church service held in the U.S. Capitol House of Representatives chambers every single Sunday for over sixty years. The very one that many in our culture say was opposed to church and state being mixed, Thomas Jefferson, attended those worship services regularly throughout his presidency.

There was a second Great Awakening that happened shortly after the founding of our nation that began in 1797 and continued all the way up until the Civil War. Again, there were vast movements of people coming to Christ. It touched big cities this time: New York in 1808; in 1815 Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Providence; and in city after city and in camp meetings. In fact, in one part of western New York, they called it the "burned-over area." So many fires of revival had come through there, it was referred to as just one giant burned-over area. In fact, it is said there wasn't a single part of what existed as our country during that time period that wasn't touched by evangelical Christianity. It spawned the missionary movement. It brought thousands into the kingdom. God has worked in powerful ways when His people have drawn near and restored their fervor and love in Christ alone.

What do you think our nation will be like fifty years from now? What do you want it to be for your children and grandchildren? Why is it that churches flourish in our land and yet the culture seems to

overwhelm us? We seem to have so little impact. Why is it that too often when we begin to feel threatened by what is happening in the culture, we seek to fight the war with human weapons, rather than coming on our face before God and asking Him to do what only He can do?

My father and my grandfather have both served in the legislature of this state. My father is so frustrated because there are problems and problems and more problems in our culture. Everybody is coming to the government wanting a solution or more money. Dad has told me many times, sometimes with tears on Friday afternoons when he comes by our house at the end of the session, “There is no hope apart from God’s redeeming work in people’s lives.” The government cannot fix it. A great and godly president cannot fix it. It has to be a moving, a working, of God’s Spirit in individual after individual after individual—one person at a time transformed by the power and presence of Christ.

Would God be stirring in your own heart a passion, a hunger, a homesickness for Him that would deepen your own walk with Him? Would He stir within us a passion to see others reached—a nation transformed? Listen again to the words of Psalm 85:

**O LORD, You showed favor to Your land;
You restored the captivity of Jacob.
You forgave the iniquity of Your people;
You covered all their sin. Selah.
You withdrew all Your fury;
You turned away from Your burning anger.**

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

**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.
Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him,
That glory may dwell in our land.
Lovingkindness and truth have met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
Truth springs from the earth,
And righteousness looks down from heaven.
Indeed, the LORD will give what is good,
And our land will yield its produce.
Righteousness will go before Him
And will make His footsteps into a way.**

*Scripture quotations are from the NASB (New American Standard) translation.
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