

Taking a Fresh Look at Revival

Thus far in this series on Psalm 85, we've seen God doing a work of revival in answer to the Psalmist's prayer for God to "...revive us again...." (85:6). We saw that the Psalmist remembers God's past mercies. We've also seen that remembering what God has done in the past, helps him deal with present afflictions. Let's look now at future glory. Keep in mind that *future glory* as I'm presenting this from our Psalm is not *merely* connected to our life in heaven. Although it includes that, it's also connected to a future work of God that follows their *present afflictions*. As we come to verse 8, the Psalmist takes some time to wait on the LORD to hear how God will answer his prayer on behalf of the people. "*Let me hear* what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly." Notice that the last phrase, "let them not turn back to folly," indicates a sinful straying from God's Word and ways. Folly or foolishness in Scripture is often contrasted with wisdom. "In everything the prudent (or wise) acts with knowledge, but a fool flaunts his folly." (Pr. 13:16)

Notice now that the speaker reminds them, and us, of a very important covenant promise from God in verse 9. "Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land." This verse may remind us of the words of God as given from the prophet Isaiah. It's interesting that this is from a section of Isaiah's prophecy that compares the idols of Babylon to the true God of the Covenant. In this portion of Isaiah, God calls his people away from their stubbornness of heart and back to him. "Listen to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from righteousness: *I bring near* my righteousness; it is not far off, and my salvation will not delay; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory." (Is. 46:13) God is near to all those who call on him in truth! I referenced the prophet Zechariah earlier in this series as one who was writing during the historical time period of the Babylonian Captivity that this Psalm is likely referring to. In Zechariah 2:5 we read of God's promise to his people: "And I will be to her a wall of fire all around," declares the LORD, "and I will be the *glory in her midst*." And this is what we want to see highlighted in this section; God's *presence* with his people.

In this next verse, the Psalmist speaks with the confidence that he *has* in God as he gives God's words that are wrapped up in God's covenant promises as he, once again, uses important covenant language. "Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other." It's all but impossible not to see the blessings of Jesus Christ and his salvation in this verse. The phrase "steadfast love and faithfulness meet" is Covenant language. This phrase can also be translated, "mercy and truth are met together." In a perfect way, "mercy and truth" meet in Jesus Christ. God cannot compromise his truth and justice, and he shows mercy to sinners who deserve death and Hell in our salvation in Jesus. We can see this same thing in the parallel phrase "righteousness and peace kiss each other." Jesus is perfect righteousness and that perfect righteousness is imputed to all those who trust him by faith. He is also the prince of peace and comes to bring peace between sinful man and a holy God. We see this in Romans 5:1 where we read: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Scholars note that verse 11 speaks of God's saving mercies *even now* in the Church.

"Faithfulness (or truth) springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky." God's truth goes forth faithfully in the church, by his grace, and God's "righteousness" is shone as if from heaven to a dying world. John Calvin writes, "...righteousness is represented as looking down from heaven, because it is the free gift of God, and not acquired by the merit of works..." The practical righteousness shown by God's people is not perfect righteousness, but it reminds us that those who are objectively righteous in Christ in their justification are, by grace, to live practically righteous lives in their sanctification. This is followed now by verse 12: "Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase." One scholar writes of this verse, "Notice that earthly goods flow from God *after* spiritual life has been restored; God's concern for our spiritual revival takes precedence over merely outward or earthly blessings."

Lastly, verse 13 may point to the Church as she seeks—as a messenger—to herald the goodness of God and point others to Christ by seeking to reflect God's goodness. Having been given imputed righteousness in Christ as a free gift we'll then seek, by grace, to live our lives in practical righteousness. This imputed and practical righteousness will act like a herald to point people to all God's blessings given in Jesus Christ. We want people to know that Christ has come, and we want them to be prepared because he's coming again. The last portion of the phrase may mean, "to make his footsteps a way *to walk in.*" Throughout this Psalm, we've seen the need for revival and restoration in God's people corporately as well as individually.

The topic of revival has been one of confusion throughout the history of the Church. We know that the Spirit of God must, necessarily, be at work to bring about revival. We're not given all the clarity that we'd like about the work of the Spirit in the Old Testament, but we're given more clarity in the New Testament. That being true, how will we know if genuine revival is happening, whether in the Church or in our lives individually? Is there some hidden mystery to how and when the Holy Spirit is actively involved in our lives? Should we expect some type of *euphoric feelings* that ensure us that this is truly the Spirit's work? I want to suggest that we can know how the Holy Spirit works in our lives because God's Word in Scripture gives us clear teaching so that we don't have to be confused. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, in his book entitled, "The Holy Spirit" writes, "The ministry of the Holy Spirit in reshaping us to be more like Christ can be said to be the central function of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian believer." Revival is a work of God's grace in the life of his people. God is, in an ongoing way, at work "reshaping us to be more like Christ." As we think about genuine revival, we should never disconnect God's work of revival from continuing to grow in the knowledge of his word, confess our sins, and to seek, by grace, to live obedient lives.

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