

Restore Us Again, O Lord

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Preacher: Robin Silson

[0 : 00] You get to a certain age, I don't think I'm quite there yet, when you talk about the good old days. It wasn't like that in my day, it was better in the past.

You could leave all your doors open, everyone was safe, we had a community, people helped each other out. Those were the days. Now, my grandad who's with the Lord now, he used to talk a little bit like that.

He used to tell me regularly about how much he could get for a shilling. Now, some of you might think, what is he talking about? A shilling?

It's old money. I don't even know how much that is in today's money. But he used to say, I used to be able to go out with a shilling. Every time he told me this, the amount that he could do for a shilling seems to get more.

He said, I used to go out with a shilling, I used to go to the football, get the bus there and back, get fish and chips for the family and still have changed for a paper. Those were the good old days.

Now, if you're a bit younger, maybe we don't use that terminology, the good old days.

[1 : 02] But we all love to reminisce about our past. And I think the way that we might talk about it is our glory days. Our glory days.

Maybe it was that time in your 20s, you went away on your first holiday or maybe the days you remember graduating, those times when you used to live in student accommodation.

Other times when we remember our past, the glory days, it's nostalgia. Now for us, we're tempted outweigh to look at glory days through slightly roast tinted glasses.

But nevertheless, it is a time, the reason we look back and think of it in nostalgic ways because we love to relive it. And we're going to see that this is what the God's people are experiencing at the writing of the Psalm.

Now, we don't know exactly when this Psalm was written, but everything in the language used points to it being written when the Israelites had returned from exile back to Jerusalem.

[2 : 06] At that time, when they went back to Jerusalem after being in exile, the Israelites really did experience a yearning for glory days because when they looked back or they heard their ancestors tell them stories, there really was a time when they weren't looking through roast tinted spectacles because there really was a time when Israel God's people were much more glorious than when the Psalm was written.

And I don't mean just the metaphor as glorious sort of good moments in nostalgic moments, but there was a time of true glory when the presence of God, the glory of God was present with his people right at the heart of Jerusalem, his very presence, his glory was present, dwelling with them in the inner sanctuary of the temple.

Those were Israel's glory days, the glory of God living with them days. But when the Psalmist writes this song, those days are long gone.

The temple and Jerusalem along with it had been destroyed by the Babylonian Empire just to give you an idea of geography. Babylon is where modern day Iraq is.

God's people had been taken into captivity and the presence, the glory of God dwelling with his people disappeared. It was something that only the older members of the community could remember.

[3 : 39] But the captivity, as you know, it wasn't the end of the story. God's people eventually returned to Israel. They rebuilt the temple, but here's the twist with the story.

The twist of the story for God's people is that they returned to Israel, but the glory, the actual presence of the glory of God with his people, it never returns.

Now, it is quite hard for any of us today, I suppose, to really understand what we mean by the glory of God dwelling. It's not where God lived as such, but it's where he was, there was an intense manifestation of his radiance and beauty and glory inside the temple.

And this is where we're at, I think, when we come to this Psalm. It's important sometimes to set a context of where we are because it helps us to understand the emotive response that God's people had.

They've returned to Israel, they've rebuilt the temple, but the glory of God isn't there. They want to be restored to their former glory.

[4 : 48] And so as we come to this Psalm, that's what we're going to be thinking about, what this Psalm means to God's people, and through that, the significance of what it might mean for his church today.

The first thing I want us to look at is, revive us again as you did in the past. Revive us again as you did in the past. This song is a lament.

And what we see is there's kind of, there's a partial happiness. They're happy to be back in the land, but it's not like it used to be. They've seen God's goodness to them.

You see with that in verse 1, Lord, you were favorable to your land. You restored the fortunes of Jacob. Jacob just means Israel here.

God showed them favor by returning them from captivity. We know what it means, don't we, if something is restored. Some of us will remember quite a few years back.

[5 : 46] Maybe some of, for others, there's other more recent memories, but I don't know if you remember Windsor Castle when it went up in flames, or even more recently Notre Dame.

The work of the craftsmen involved to restore Windsor Castle was to restore it to its former glory. Notre Dame, I just read the other days, hopefully going to be restored to the public so that we can, people can go visit again in the next year or so.

The point, the point of restoration is to be restored to how things used to be. That's the same with God's people, and there's something even more pertinent with God's people, because the restoration of the land is an indication to them that they are blessed spiritually.

It's an indication that they're blessed spiritually, that God actually has forgiven them. Verse two, you forgive the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. Verse three, we see He's turned aside His anger and wrath.

If the Psalm finished at verse three, you would assume, you would assume that everything was good, but then we get this change, the change that leaves with annoying question.

[7 : 05] If they're in the land, if they've been forgiven, why is it different? Why hasn't the glory of God returned? Why is God not present with His people in the same way? It leads them to pour their hearts out.

Verse six, restore us again, O God of our salvation. Put away your indignation. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice?

Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. You might say, you might say that they feel like they've only been partially restored.

We want to be restored to our former glory. You imagine Notre Dame being reopened, but there's no windows or half the building is still in rubble, yet the other half is immaculate.

That's how it feels to them. They're in the land, but the glory's not there. Now, we're not the Old Testament people of God, the people of Israel, we're New Testament believers, the church, and the church is not tied to a geographical land.

[8 : 08] The church is made up of all nations. However, we're well aware that there are some areas of our world where the church, the people of God are growing at an unprecedented rate in Sub-Saharan and Western Africa and in other areas of Asia.

Yet, we might look at our own nation in Scotland, and we've seen over the 20 years and more the church in different parts of our nation shrinking.

It could feel to us as we look at Scotland, knowing it's not a geographical thing, like the glory days for Christianity in Scotland have gone.

Just like the Israelites look to God to restore their nation, it is right for us to desire God to restore the church here. As it's well documented, as you'll have heard it many times said from this front here, Scotland used to be known as the land of the book, the land of the Bible.

You might look and say the church, God's people, are still around, of course we are, but it doesn't look as glorious. Do we feel that? Because I feel that.

[9 : 22] There are lots of reasons as to why that has happened. We could spend a long time going through looking at that, but notice here in this psalm, the writer, he doesn't give reasons as to why.

He just wants the glory to return. There is times, and appropriate times, when we could talk about why the church has gone in that way, and that has its place at the right moment, realizing mistakes made by the church should stop us from making the same mistakes twice.

But that's not mentioned in the psalm. The emphasis is not on what man should have done, but asking God to be the orchestrator of restoring his own glory.

That is what we need. As individuals and as a corporate entity, we need God. And we need Him to hear us and to answer us because we rely on Him alone to do it.

The restoration of God's people in the land comes from God. The restoration of His glory comes from Him. And we are at His mercy. We can't do it. It's down to Him. And so we plead and we lament with the saints restore us.

[10 : 39] Revive us again. Renew us again. So that we might rejoice in you. Show us your salvation.

The second thing I want us to look at is the psalmist's response.

He says, I will listen to what God the Lord says. The signs of restoration, despite the fact that He knows that restoration comes from God alone, the signs of restoration come from God's people first, comes from the church being restored.

After lamenting about the state that God's people find themselves in, the psalmist sings of how God works in their hearts to bring about His glory in the land.

When you look with me in our translation, it says, let me hear, this is the psalmist speaking, let me hear what God the Lord will speak. I like the version we had in the psalm and it's the same in the NIV.

[11 : 50] I will listen to what God the Lord says. I will listen to what God the Lord says. He will speak peace to His people, to His saints, but let them not turn to foley.

Surely, surely His salvation is near those who fear Him, that His glory may dwell in our land. You see what the psalmist is singing?

God speaks, he promises peace to His people and when those promises are listened to and believed in by His people, that God promises peace and reconciliation to the faithful.

When He's taken out His word, that is a demonstration that He's there and that He's at work in them. Then surely the psalmist sings.

Surely if that's what's seen and believed in the people, if it's witnessed in the community of the saints, then surely salvation is near. Surely the glory is dwelling with them in a different kind of a way.

[12 : 52] Surely that's true. But what we see here is the psalmist realizes something, that the physical presence of the glory of God may not have returned, but nevertheless they believe His promises.

Listen to what he says. Take Him out His word and live in accordance with it. Because God is glorified when the people of God respond to the Word of God with repentance and faith, believing in His promises.

When God's people, when we can stand and we can sing like we have done, I will listen to what God the Lord says. I will listen. I will listen to what God the Lord says.

Just recently we've had some renovations done in the house that we've been living at. We had to move out for a little bit and these guys, the great guys, but they were kind of old school laborers. They didn't do contracts when sorting out the job. I don't know if you've ever dealt with anything like that, but maybe that would make you a little bit nervous. They didn't do contracts, they just gave their word.

[14 : 00] In today's world, like I say, but in an older world, if somebody gave their word, that was as good as binding. This is what God wants us to do.

It's what the psalmist chooses to do. I will listen to what God the Lord says. Like Israel looked at the restoration effort, they would have been tempted to feel discouraged.

There is temptation for us to look at God's word and are we tempted to take Him at His word or not? We might, as I say, look at Scotland and feel the same way.

We live in a different time. The culture has changed. What's God doing? Why has this happened? Why is there some churches that have drifted and tried to fit in with the culture, sacrificed the gospel?

We don't have all the answers, but despite that all being true, will we say together, I will listen to what the Lord says. I will take Him at His word, I will trust and believe in Him and live according to His word.

[15 : 08] If you're here this evening and the things of Christianity are perhaps new to you or you're looking into the claims that Jesus made, that the church makes about Jesus, this is what we believe.

We believe that when God makes promises, He keeps them. And that He has promised to all people, no matter what background or what people have done, if they turn to Him, if you ask Jesus, if you turn to Him and ask Him to come into your life to help you, to save you, then the God who made you will promise, will give you a future of hope, of peace, of reconciliation, of forgiveness. Will give you a purpose in your life when it feels empty. He'll accept you unconditionally to love you. Imagine that with no conditions attached.

There's no hidden small print. It does sound too good to be true, but there's no catch. He'll accept you as you are and then change you day by day to be the best, most holy version of you.

The gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ are His promises to you, to us, that are enacted and brought into fulfillment through His life, death and resurrection.

[16 : 21] Because He died to take away your guilt and shame. Your guilt and your shame died with Him and then He was raised to new life to destroy sin, death and all evil. And He will never go back on His promises.

We take Him at His word. We take Him at His word. Which brings us to the last bit of the psalm. This last bit of the psalm is amazing. We get this amazing picture of God in the last few verses. Love and righteousness meet together. Now, there's something here that we see that is unique about God in who He is.

It's something that you know the person is like. As people, we're only able to show one characteristic, one emotional response or attribute at a time.

[17 : 16] That's because we change. And we change when our circumstances change. You know what it's like. If someone cuts you up on the road, you get angry. Now, if you're normally kind of a relaxed, peaceful kind of guy, in that moment when someone does that to you on the road, you are anything but relaxed and peaceful.

We can't be those two things at the same time. Our emotional responses, how we feel, they change in line with our circumstances and it affects how we respond.

I don't know about you. Maybe this is just me, but I feel like I change 10 times in an hour. Angry, happy, worried, sad and with each emotion, with each feeling, we change.

But in these few verses, we get a picture of God that reminds us that He is unchanging, that circumstances do not alter Him. He's not up or down. He doesn't feel low.

He doesn't actually respond to anything based on His emotions. He's always the same. And He is always consistent with who He is.

[18 : 25] We see it, we see it poetically with how the psalmist describes His character traits and His intervention into the world, look with me. Steadfast love and faithfulness meet.

Righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground and righteousness looks down from the sky.

There are not two sides of God, like an angry and a happy side. But who He is is woven together with all His attributes, His character traits. If you like singing in perfect union within Himself, they're not odds.

The reason the psalmist moves to this poetic description of God, because this is the reason we can trust His promises. This is the reason it's because of who He is.

It's because of His character that He doesn't change, that He will always be faithful to His promises because He makes a promise. He doesn't change His mind and go back on it. It's because of who He is that we can trust His promises.

[19 : 37] The real issue in our hearts, the real issue in our hearts is that there is no one else like this. People will let you down and will let other people down because we change and circumstances change us.

There are times when we react unexpectedly or we go back on our word. Once this is who our God is, His character that doesn't change, we can take Him at His word.

We can take Him at His word. The psalmist is declaring in song, whether God's visible glory is here or not, God will always act according to who He is.

He will always be full of peace, of love, of righteous anger, of faithfulness, of mercy, and grace, and all at the same time His promises will remain. He doesn't change.

And ultimately, where do we see this played out? For us as New Testament believers, God being faithful to His promises, hearing their prayer and answering it by sending His own Son, Jesus Christ.

[20 : 43] This is actually how this prayer is truly answered. Do you see how beautiful it makes this psalm? It makes this psalm stunningly beautiful because the people want the glory to return and they pray for it.

And then 400 years later it's answered. The glory returns to the land, but in a way they didn't expect because the glory of God comes down in a person.

He's the missing glory. He is the temple. John 1.14, the word that's Jesus. The word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.

We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father full of grace and truth. That prayer really is answered. The glory really does dwell in the land once again in the person of God's Son.

When God's people say together when they ask Him, shows Your steadfast love, Lord, grant us Your salvation. He shows them His steadfast love. He sends His Son to die in their place.

[21 : 47] Prayer love has no one than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. Show us Your love, Lord. Show us Your glory, Lord. Here's my Son purchasing Your freedom.

And all the qualities in this psalm we see in Him because Jesus is full of love, of peace, of righteous anger, of faithfulness, of mercy and grace, all at the same time His promises remain.

Be as follows of Jesus, sing this song, knowing that the answer to be restored to true renewal and revival of our own souls and of the church in Scotland and globally, it comes from this man who came down from Jesus Christ and taking Him at His word.

And we can take Him at His word today because He kept it. Verse 12, the Lord will give what is good.

This is what Jesus offers. This is what Jesus offers. He not only wants to restore the church, but He wants to revive and restore us as part of that.

[22 : 55] Not the glory days, to the good old days of your past. He wants to give you something better, the glory that comes from knowing Jesus Christ.

To give you new life, new life connected to Him to take away your mess so that you receive from Him by being united to Him purpose, direction and fulfillment, peace, joy and hopes in the middle of your struggles.

This is what the living God promises to each one of us to be restored, truly restored and revived in Him if we take Him at His word.

And so as we come in for landing, let this psalm, the song, be your song and your prayer. Do we long, do you long for the church to be revived and restored?

We'll take Jesus at His word that He keeps His promises that He'll build His church. Do we long to be revived and restored? Will we say together, I will listen.

[23 : 54] I will listen to what the Lord says. I will look at the person of His Son to see the true glory. Let me pray.

Almighty God, we praise You and we thank You for Your Son.

We thank You for all that You have done and we thank You that You are the true glory. We thank You for how, it is amazing how this prayer was answered that Your glory and the person of His Son did dwell in the land.

And so we pray that You would revive and restore us both personally, corporately and the church in our land. We long for that and we want to take, we want you to be at work in our hearts so that we do take you at Your word.

We thank You that we can trust in Your promises because of who You are, because of Your covenant love, Your steadfast love that never goes away, that doesn't spoil, perish or fade the inheritance that You've promised us.

[25 : 01] We give You great thanks and for knowing that that is true for us, that great promise that You've given to each one of us. And so bless us and restore us, we pray.
We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.