

## Restore Us Again

### Psalm 85 (NIV)

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm.

<sup>1</sup> You, LORD, showed favor to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. <sup>2</sup> You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. <sup>3</sup> You set aside all your wrath and turned from your fierce anger. <sup>4</sup> Restore us again, God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. <sup>5</sup> Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? <sup>6</sup> Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? <sup>7</sup> Show us your unfailing love, LORD, and grant us your salvation. <sup>8</sup> I will listen to what God the LORD says; he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants— but let them not turn to folly. <sup>9</sup> Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. <sup>10</sup> Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. <sup>11</sup> Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. <sup>12</sup> The LORD will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. <sup>13</sup> Righteousness goes before him and prepares the way for his steps.

All our Bible readings for this given Sunday are about preachers, relaying to us information about their qualifications, their calling, and their instructions for carrying out their calls. But what about their message? What did they actually preach? Amos preached judgment. The Twelve Disciples of Jesus preached that people should repent. Psalm 85 acts as a good summary of their message.

This psalm, this song used for worship, centers around a theme of restoration. “You, LORD, showed favor to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.” (verse 1) “Restore us again, God our Savior.” (verse 4) “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” (verse 6) What was on the minds of God’s people that led them to cry out for restoration? A specific event isn’t listed, but their feelings are. “Put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations?” (verses 4b-5)

What were the Israelites so troubled about? They observed how things were going for them and it was bad. Maybe they had foreign invaders occupying their cities, pillaging their crops. Maybe they were beaten down by this year after year for forty years of wandering in the wilderness following their exodus from Egypt. Maybe like Jeremiah they were painfully recalling the horror as Jerusalem and God’s temple were destroyed by the Babylonians. Whatever specific event or sin they had on their minds, it was something great enough that they felt as if they had not only lost favor with God but that he was mad at them. They felt like they were walking on eggshells, that each subsequent thing that went wrong in their lives was because of the wrong thing they had done, that nothing they could do would make it up to God and that he would love them again.

We’ve been there. We’ve done or said that one thing that crossed the line. We wronged that person. Trust was betrayed. Feelings were hurt. Blame was given. We look at them but can’t tell what they are thinking by the expression on their face. We know that what we have done is not right. We do things to try to make it up to them, to restore the relationship, but until an affirmation is given, we’re paranoid that anything we say or do will only drive this person further away, that they have every right to be angry with me and I cannot fix this.

I felt this way most strongly when I was really young, like 9 or 10. I had sinned. I stole \$20 out of my Dad’s wallet. I then gathered a couple of my friends and went to the dime store just a couple of blocks away. We bought candy and some toys, but I felt guilty. I felt the guilt as I ate the candy in hiding. And it didn’t take long for my Dad to notice the missing money. I remember the anger. I remember admitting to what I had done, feeling the shame. I remember the punishment. I remember having to repay my Dad.

The worst part of it was the look of disappointment in my parents’ eyes. They told me that day that they couldn’t trust me anymore. This distrust didn’t go away in a week. It didn’t go away after I served the sentence for my grounding. It didn’t go away after I repaid my Dad. A year, maybe two, went by. I still felt the distrust. How could I make this up to them? How could I make them trust me again? I couldn’t.

The distrust culminated when I ended up going by myself to church one Sunday. Dad didn’t often go. Mom had something else going on. So, she gave me her offering envelope since I was going to church. I put it in the offering plate as I was striving to live right by God and be an obedient son. A day or two later, my Mom gets a call from church. The envelope was empty. I was asked if I had taken the money inside. I pleaded my innocence but felt defeated at the same time since I had lost their trust. I had a record. Why would they believe me? Why should they believe me? There was nothing I could say to make them trust me.

But my Mom said, "I believe you." I hadn't deserved it or earned it, but my Mom decided to trust me again. The weight of distrust was finally lifted from my shoulders. I was elated! I was restored!

When you have sinned, do you feel like every bad thing that happens to you is God punishing you, like a little swat upside the head, that he is showing you in subtle ways that he is angry with you and your choices in life? The string of bad things may last only for a day or two or they may last for years, each bad thing cementing your feeling that God hates you, that God is mad at you for what you did wrong - whatever that was - and that his angry is not decreasing. We plead, we bargain, "God, just make this go better. I'm sorry! Forgive me. Please stop punishing me. I can't take this anymore. I feel so unloved, as if I can't approach you. Restore my fortunes again!"

We feel this way because we have broken our relationship with God with our sin. We feel the guilt, like me in secret eating that candy purchased with stolen money. We know that God has every right to be angry with us, we just don't want him to be.

When the psalm writers felt like this, they reflected on the past. They looked at what God had done for them before. "You, LORD, showed favor to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. You set aside all your wrath and turned from your fierce anger." (verses 1-3) You, Lord, restored us in the past. Why? Not because we deserved it. Not because enough time had passed. But because this was your decision. You forgave us because you covered our sins.

The Old Testament believers saw a picture of this forgiveness in the Day of Atonement sacrifice. For that special festival at the temple, the high priest sprinkled the blood of the bull and goat on the atonement cover of the ark of the covenant where the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments were kept. Blood of the sacrifice covered over the laws and commands of God. This was a preview of how God would cover the sins of the world. Jesus as both God and man kept all of his laws, God's laws, for us in our place. He shed his blood to cover all our sins, all the times we broke his law. This is why God forgives us. This is why God sets aside all his wrath and fierce anger from us. This is why God restores us. Because Jesus' blood has covered over all our sins, he will not be angry with us forever. He restores us to a good standing with him because our sins are covered.

God using his blood to cover over our sins to forgive our iniquity, this is an accomplished fact. Because God has done this, we know that he will forgive us again, restore us again. Yes, there are consequences of our sinful actions that we endure, but God has and does forgive us. These bad things that happen to you, this is not God punishing you. These are the effects of living in a sinful world. God is not angry with you. He forgives you, covering all your sins with his own blood. There is no more anger for you or for what you did. His wrath was turned away and taken out on himself as he suffered and died for us on the cross.

If you think that God is still angry with you, that he just might be angry with you forever because of what you have done, as bad things keep happening, do as the psalmist wrote and "listen to what God the LORD says. He promises peace to his people, his faithful servants." (verse 8) You are forgiven because God covered all your sins, no matter how great they seem to you. You have been declared righteous in his sight, right with God. And so you have peace with him. You know where you stand with God right now. You are forgiven. He is angry at you no more and never again. He set his anger aside because he covered your sins. You are restored!

This is God's unfailing love for you. You can always count on it. It will never go away. This is an accomplished fact, one that we need to continually come back to whenever we sin, whenever we turn to folly. I know that God will restore me and you again and again because he has forgiven our iniquity by covering all our sin. This is the message that God gives us through his preachers, through the prophets and apostles. You are restored with God!

When my Mom told me that she trusted me, I was finally restored. It was her words, her choice, that restored me, not mine. God is telling you right here and right now that you are restored. Listen to what God the LORD says. Your sins are covered. His wrath and anger over your sins is turned away. This action of love from God is unfailing. It will never go away. Let us not return to our folly because God has restored us. Amen.