

A Prayer For 2019

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[0 : 00] Well, if I could, this morning, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in the book of Psalms and Psalm 85.

The book of Psalms and Psalm 85. I want us to walk through this Psalm, but if we just read again at verse 5. Psalm 85 at verse 5.

Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you?

Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you?

As we begin a new year in our lives, it's at this time of year that our feelings, they're very sensitive.

[1 : 05] And our emotions are often heightened. Because as we look back over the year that has just gone by, and we step over, as you could say, over the threshold into a new year, we're often reminded that it's not only time that never stands still.

We never stand still either. We're always changing. And our lives are constantly changing. And of course, as we were saying to the children, these changes in our lives and these changes that may take place in 2019, they may fill us with joy and excitement.

But on the other hand, there are also changes that take place in our lives that also fill us with fear and anxiety as to what could hold for us in 2019.

Because whatever we went through in 2018, we can safely say that we are not the same people we were this time last year. We're not the same.

Our circumstances have changed. Our lives have changed. Those around us have changed.

Maybe your heart has changed. And, you know, when we think of all the changes that take place in our congregation and even in our community since this time last year, all these changes of strength and weakness, health and illness, additions and subtractions.

[2 : 30] You know, we often begin a new year wondering what this year will hold for us. Of course, we know that none of us know what the future holds. But we don't even know what a day or an hour will bring in our lives.

And yet, you know, it's one of the greatest blessings that we don't know. But the wonderful thing is that we know that the Lord knows. He holds our future. But, you know, as we begin 2019 with many changes in our congregation and many changes in our community, there's one change that needs to take place in our congregation.

Now, my unconverted friend, although I'd love to talk to your heart today directly about the change that needs to take place in your life. I want to talk to us today about us as a congregation, as a church and as a community.

And yes, even our country. Because Psalm 85, it reminds us that as we begin a new year, what we need to pray for more than ever is revival.

And this need to pray for revival, it has been heavy on my heart. Because this year, 2019, it marks 70 years since the Barber's revival in 1949.

[3 : 48] And during which the church was revived and many people were converted. And, you know, all these years on, there are still people in this community who testify to God's work of revival in this congregation and in this community.

But, you know, as we saw even in the last couple of weeks, there are those who were converted during the revival, whom the Lord has recently taken home to glory.

Duncan Mackay and then Maggie Mary MacDonald. And, you know, whenever you met these people, and there are many others like Reverend William MacLeod and even Jesse, Duncan Mackay's widow.

When you met these people, there was something about them. There was something different about them. And that even despite the passing of time and the weakness of old age, there was still this fire in their heart and this continual burning desire to see Christ's name exalted.

And, you know, as we begin a new year, as we begin 2019, that's what we need to pray for. We need to pray that the Lord would restore and revive us as a congregation, as a church, as a community, and as a country.

[5 : 08] And, you know, that's what Psalm 85 is all about. Psalm 85 is a prayer for restoration and revival. And, you know, as we begin a new year, I want us to see that Psalm 85 should be our prayer for the church in 2019.

My friends, Psalm 85 is a prayer for the church in 2019. Because Psalm 85 is teaching us to pray, restore us, revive us, and redeem us.

Psalm 85 is teaching us to pray, restore us, revive us, and redeem us. And that's what I'd like us to see as we look at this Psalm. Restore us, revive us, and redeem us.

So first of all, the Psalmist is teaching us to pray, restore us, in verses 1 to 4. He says, Lord, you were favorable to your land. You restored the fortunes of Jacob.

You forgave the iniquity of your people. You covered all their sin. You withdrew all your wrath. You turned from your hot anger. Restore us again, O God, of our salvation.

[6 : 14] And put away your indignation towards us. Psalm 85, it opens by the Psalmist describing what the Lord has done for his people, and how the Lord has showed them favor.

Because the Psalmist says, Lord, you were favorable to your land. But how was the Lord favorable to the land of Israel? And the Psalmist says, in the following verses, he says, you restored our fortunes.

You forgave our iniquity. You covered all our sin. You withdrew your wrath, and you turned away your anger. The Psalmist is saying, Lord, you did it. Lord, you did it.

But the question is, why did the Lord do it? And the answer is in who the Psalmist is addressing. Because as he opens the Psalm, he addresses Lord.

He addresses the Lord. He says, Lord, you were favorable to your land. You restored the fortunes of Jacob. The Psalmist, he attributes the favor of God, the fortunes restored of the people, the forgiveness of iniquity, the covering of sins, the withdrawing of God's wrath, and the turning away from anger.

[7 : 25] The Psalmist attributes all of it to his covenant king, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because, you know, the Psalmist, as we said last week, when we see the title Lord in capital letters, we need to remember that it's the title of the covenant king.

And it's a title that always draws our attention to the Lord's faithfulness and commitment to his covenant people. It's a word that should remind us that the Lord is committed to his covenant relationship with his people.

And this covenant is an everlasting and unchanging covenant. And of course, the covenant that we're always referring to is the covenant promise that the Lord gave to Abraham long ago, way back in Genesis chapter 12, where Abraham, he received this covenant promise, not by any merit, not by works of righteousness.

He received the promise by faith alone. And in that covenant promise, the Lord promised to Abraham and to all his descendants, to Isaac, to Jacob, to all the children of Israel, the Lord promised to them, I will be your God and you will be my people.

The Lord entered into this covenant relationship with his people. And the Lord promised to them that even if they were wayward, even if they were disobedient, even if they were unfaithful to the covenant, he would always remain faithful.

[8 : 52] That's why we call it a covenant of grace. Because God in his love and out of his own good pleasure, he graciously entered into this covenant relationship with his people.

I will be your God. You will be my people. The Lord bound himself to them in covenant promise.

And you know, the beauty of God's covenant of grace is that there is nothing that can break it.

There's nothing that can break this covenant. Because the Lord is the one who keeps covenant.

And he's faithful and he's committed to his covenant people. You know, that's why this title, Lord,

whenever we see it, it should always remind us that his name means the one who keeps covenant.

The one who keeps covenant. And you know, that's why the psalmist is pleading for the Lord to

restore the land of Israel. Because the psalmist knows that it's only according to the covenant that

the Lord will promise to restore our fortunes, to forgive our iniquity, to cover our sin, to withdraw his wrath and turn away his anger.

It's only because of the Lord's covenant faithfulness and commitment that the psalmist can even plead such a prayer. But you know, the thing about the psalmist's prayer is that he's praying from experience.

[10:18] He's praying from experience. The psalmist is not only praying that the Lord would restore the fortunes of his people just because he knows that the Lord will be faithful to his covenant.

But the psalmist is also praying because he has first-hand experience of the Lord restoring the fortunes of his people. He has personal experience of the Lord forgiving their iniquities and covering their sins and withdrawing his wrath and turning away his anger.

And the psalmist's personal experience of the Lord moving in power is when he brought his people out of exile in Babylon. That's when Psalm 85 was written.

Psalm 85 was written after the Israelites had returned from 70 years of exile in Babylon. You remember that they were sent into Babylon because of their sin and their disobedience, their idolatry.

The Lord promised he would bring judgment upon them if they didn't repent. And in 586 BC, Jerusalem was invaded by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar.

[11:26] The city was destroyed. The temple was left in ruins. And the Israelites, they were taken as slaves into Babylon. And there in Babylon, the Israelites, they were made to live in a foreign land under the rule of a foreign king.

And they were made to worship and bow down to foreign gods. And yet, despite their repeated sin and idolatry, the Lord remained faithful.

He remained committed to his covenant relationship with his people. I will be your God. You will be my people. And after 70 years of exile in Babylon, the Israelites, they were brought back.

They were redeemed. They were saved from Babylon and they returned to Israel. They returned to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. They returned to restore the temple.

And when the Israelites returned, they couldn't believe it. The salvation that the Lord had accomplished for them, it amazed them. They were amazed at what the Lord had done.

[12:28] That's why we were singing earlier in Psalm 126, when the psalmist says, when Zion's bondage, God turned back. As men that dreamed were we, then filled with laughter was our mouth, our tongue with melody.

The people rejoiced to see the Lord restoring the fortunes of his people. They rejoiced to know that the Lord had forgiven their sins and covered their iniquities and withdrawn his wrath and turned away his anger.

the people rejoiced and the psalmist rejoiced to see the Lord restoring the fortunes of his people.

But you know, now, in a day of apathy and half-hearted commitment to the Lord, the psalmist prays here in Psalm 85 that the Lord would do it again.

Do it again. That's his prayer. Do it again. The psalmist, he had first-hand experience of the Lord restoring and rescuing his people from exile.

He had first-hand experience of the Lord forgiving their iniquities and covering their sins. And now he's pleading with the Lord and praying to him, Lord, do it again.

[13:45] Do it again. And you know, my friend, as those who live in this community with first-hand experience of people we know and have met who have seen, of people who have seen the Lord move and revive the church in this community.

And we've met them. We've heard their testimonies. Some of you are related to them. And we know that they've experienced, what they've experienced is the covenant faithfulness of the Lord moving power.

And like the psalmist, it's our personal experience of past blessing that should stir up within us this earnest desire to see the Lord move in power again.

It should give to us this plea and this prayer of the psalmist because the psalmist says in verse 4, Restore us again, O God of our salvation and put away your indignation towards us.

The psalmist, he pleads and he prays, Restore us again. Do it again, Lord. And this plea and this prayer for the Lord to restore his people, what he's saying is, Turn us back.

[15 : 04] Turn us back again. Bring us to repentance. The psalmist is pleading and praying to the Lord that the Lord will bring his people to repentance.

That he will give to them a spirit of repentance. That they will turn away from their apathy and their half-hearted commitment and turn back to the Lord.

And you know, that should be our plea and our prayer for 2019. That the Lord would restore us.

That the Lord would give to us a spirit of repentance.

That the Lord would give to us a genuine spirit spirit of repentance. A spirit of repentance as Christians, as a congregation, as a church, as a community, as a country.

You know, my friend, we need a spirit of repentance so that we will go on our knees, that we will plead and pray that the Lord would restore us and forgive our iniquities and cover all our sins and that the Lord would withdraw his wrath and turn away his anger.

[16 : 13] My friend, we need the Lord to restore us from our apathy and our half-hearted Christianity. We need a genuine spirit of repentance. We need to plead and to pray that our covenant king, the Lord Jesus Christ, that he will restore us.

Because it's only when we plead and pray that the Lord will restore us that we will come to that point where we are pleading and praying that the Lord will revive us.

And that's what we see secondly. This prayer for the church in 2019, we're told that we need to plead and to pray for the Lord to restore us and revive us.

Revive us. He says in verse 5, will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you?

Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. 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.

[17 : 25] Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. You know, we mentioned earlier that 2019 marks 70 years since the revival in 1949.

And in many ways, when we look at the apathy of the church and the indifference of the world and the intolerance of society today, it's hard to imagine how a revival took place in the past and how it could happen in the present or even in the future.

But the thing is, from experience, we know that revival does happen. And when it happens, well, it's not a work of man. It's a work of God, the Holy Spirit.

And that has been the testimony of the Lord's people who witnessed and experienced the revival here in Barvis. As you know, many books have been written about it. But I was recently listening to a recording of the Reverend Duncan Campbell.

And he was speaking in 1968 of what took place here in Barvis in 1949. And you can listen to what he said. It's on Sermon Audio. It's online.

[18 : 41] But in the recording, Duncan Campbell, he begins by saying, he says, I'd like to make it perfectly clear that I didn't bring revival to the Hebrides. It has grieved me beyond words to hear people talk and write about the man who brought revival to the Hebrides.

My dear people, he says, I didn't do that. Revival was there before I ever set foot on the island. It began in a gracious awareness of God sweeping through the parish of Barvis.

And when I speak of revival, says Duncan Campbell, I'm not speaking of high-pressure evangelism. I'm not speaking of crusades or special efforts convened and organized by man.

Revival is something altogether different. Revival is a moving of God in the community. And Duncan Campbell, he continues describing what went on.

He says, I'm sure that you'll be interested to know how in November 1949 this gracious movement began on the island of Lewis. It began with two old women, one of them 84 years of age and the other 82.

[19 : 47] They were greatly burdened because of the appalling state of their own parish, that they made it a special matter of prayer. The verse that gripped them was the promise of Isaiah 44.

I will pour water on him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground. They were so burdened, he says, that both of them decided to spend much time in prayer twice a week.

And one night, one of the visitors had a vision. One of the sisters had a vision. She saw the church crowded with young people, packed to the door and a strange minister standing in the pulpit.

Now the strange minister was of course Duncan Campbell who was originally invited by the local minister to come for 10 days but he ended up staying three years.

But as Duncan Campbell, as he continues to speak and explain what happened in the revival here in Barvis, he concludes by saying, this was a sovereign act of God.

[20 : 44] This was the moving of God's spirit and an answer to the prevailing prayer of men and women who believed that God was a covenant-keeping God who must be true to his covenant engagement.

And you know my friend, the point that Duncan Campbell made there is the point that the psalmist is making here. The revival, yes, it is a sovereign act of God. A God, but he's a God who acts in faithfulness and commitment to his covenant promise.

And the moving of God's spirit is an answer to the prevailing prayer of men and women who believe that God is a covenant-keeping God who will be true to his covenant engagement.

Therefore, revival, it's a work of our covenant-making and our covenant-keeping God. And you know, that's why the psalmist could plead and pray in verse 5, will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.

[21 : 54] The psalmist pleads and prays that the Lord would restore and revive his church that they may rejoice in the Lord. And you know, we have to pay particular attention to what the psalmist prays here.

Because it's very significant. When the psalmist prays for revival, he pleads that the Lord, the covenant king, the one who keeps covenant, the psalmist prays that in reviving his people, that he will reveal his steadfast love towards his people.

He says in verse 7, show us your steadfast love. Reveal to us your covenant steadfast love. And the word the psalmist uses for steadfast love.

It's the covenant word for love. It's the Hebrew word chesed. I'm sure you've heard it before. It's a covenant word.

And the word chesed, it's translated throughout the Bible or different versions of the Bible as steadfast love or mercy or loving kindness or covenant love. And it's an expression of God's covenant love towards his people.

[23 : 08] And it emphasizes the Lord's covenant commitment, his faithfulness towards his people. Because this covenant love, it's unqualified.

It's unconditional. It's unchanging. It's unrestricted. It's covenant love. And the beauty of the Lord's covenant love towards us is that his love and faithfulness doesn't depend upon our love and faithfulness towards him.

Of course, we're to respond in love towards the Lord's love. But you know, the wonder of the Lord's covenant love is that there's nothing we can do to make the Lord love us any more than he already does.

And there's nothing we can do to make him love us any less. And that's what the psalmist is praying for. And that's what we should be praying for this coming year. that in reviving his people, the Lord would reveal to us anew his steadfast covenant love.

Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints.

[24 : 21] The plea of the psalmist, it continues by the psalmist asking that the Lord would not only reveal his covenant love, but he also wants the Lord to make known his covenant peace.

And here the psalmist, he uses another Hebrew word that you'll be familiar with, the word shalom. Shalom, like in restoring and reviving his people.

The psalmist is longing that the Lord would speak covenant, shalom, covenant peace. And this covenant peace, as the Bible says, it's a peace that passes all understanding.

It's a peace and a shalom that only the covenant king can give. And this blessing of covenant peace is the benediction. You could say it's the blessing.

The same blessing that Aaron was to pronounce upon the people of Israel when they were just about to cross over into the promised land. You remember how Aaron, he lifted his hands and he said to the people, the Lord bless you and keep you.

[25 : 27] The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. My friend, this covenant shalom is a peace that only the covenant king, Jesus Christ, can give.

Because it's a promise of peace and reconciliation for sinners. Sinners who have sinned against a holy God. it's a promise of peace that you freely receive when you commit and confess the covenant king, Jesus Christ, as your Lord and Savior.

And you know, this promise of shalom, it can only be, it could only be achieved through the promise of the covenant. And the wonder of the covenant is that it always points us to the cross.

The wonder of the covenant is that it always points us to the cross. And that's where Psalm 85 reaches its climax and conclusion. Psalm 85 reaches its climax and conclusion at the cross.

It finishes at the cross. So as we said, Psalm 85 is a prayer for the church in 2019. It's a prayer. And Psalm 85 is teaching us to pray, restore us, revive us, and lastly, redeem us.

[26 : 50] redeem us. He says in verse 10, steadfast love and faithfulness meet. Righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs up from the ground and righteousness looks down from the sky.

Yes, the Lord will give what is good and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps away.

As we said, Psalm 85, in Psalm 85, the psalmist is pleading and praying according to the Lord's covenant faithfulness and commitment that the Lord would move in power in restoring and reviving his people.

And you know, by his example, the psalmist is teaching us how we as a congregation and as a church ought to pray in 2019. But as the psalmist brings us to the climax and the conclusion of his covenantal prayer, the psalmist draws attention as to how we can plead and pray for restoration and revival.

And the answer is by focusing upon the cross. Because when we read Psalm 85, we're confronted with the questions, how is restoration to come about?

[28 : 10] How is revival to take place? How is redemption to be achieved? And the psalmist reminds us that it's only by exalting and elevating the cross of the covenant king, Jesus Christ.

The cross of the covenant king, he says, must be central in our praying. It must be central in our preaching. It must be central in our pastoring. The cross of the covenant king must be the focus and the force of our message in a world that is hostile to the gospel.

Because nothing else, nothing else will restore us, nothing else will revive us, nothing else will redeem a soul apart from this message of Christ and him crucified.

And that's what these climactic and concluding verses are all about. They're all about Christ and him crucified. They're all about the cross of the covenant king.

And I say that because when the psalmist pleads and prays in verse 9, he says, surely his salvation is near to those who fear him.

[29 : 18] Literally, he's saying, surely his Jesus is near to those who love him. Because the word Jesus means salvation.

That's what the angel said to Joseph. Call his name Jesus. Call him salvation. For he shall save his people from their sins. Surely his salvation, surely his Jesus is near to those who love him.

That glory may dwell in our land. And again this speaks about Jesus. Because he is the glory that dwelt in the land of Israel. The apostle Johnny reminds us in the opening words of his gospel that Jesus was and he is the word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

And he dwelt among us, says John, that we might behold his glory. The glory is of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And you know what's amazing? What's so beautiful about this prayer is that when the psalmist prays in verse 10 and says that steadfast love and faithfulness meet, you know he's not only talking about the Lord's covenant faithfulness towards his people, he's also describing the covenant king.

[30 : 35] He is the one who is full of steadfast love and faithfulness. That's how the apostle John described him. He's one who is full of grace and truth. He's the word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

We behold his glory, the glorious of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And it's the same words that's been used here to describe the covenant king, Jesus Christ.

He's full of steadfast love and faithfulness. He's full of grace and truth. But you know there's more and you know this just blows my mind. That in verse 10 you not only have the person of Jesus Christ, you also have the work of Jesus Christ.

You have the person of Jesus Christ in that the covenant king is full of steadfast love and faithfulness. But you also have the work of Jesus Christ because it was on the cross, the cross of the covenant king, it was there that righteousness and peace kissed mutually.

It was on the cross that according to the covenant promise, the covenant king, Jesus Christ, who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

[31 : 56] It was on the cross that righteousness and peace kissed mutually. My friend, when our covenant king went to the cross, it was Calvary's great transaction where the worst about you was laid upon him and the best about him was laid upon you.

Your sins transferred to Christ, his righteousness transferred to you. And it was there that righteousness and peace kissed mutually.

And by this, our covenant king, he made peace through the blood of his cross. And through the blood of his cross, we are made righteous by faith. And we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

My friend, in Psalm 85, we have presented to us the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ. And that's only in verse 10. You go to verse 11 and we're confronted with the climax and culmination of this covenant promise revealed at the cross where faithfulness, we're told, is raised up from the ground.

The faithful covenant king, God the Son, Jesus Christ, lifted up onto the cross. And in his act of covenant obedience, righteousness looks down from heaven. God the Father looks upon his covenant Son, the one in whom he made the covenant with.

[33 : 24] He looks upon his covenant faithfulness and his covenant commitment and he's well pleased. And with the pleasure from the Father, the blessing of covenant restoration, covenant revival and covenant redemption is promised.

We're not told no. No, verse 12 says yes. Yes, the Lord will give what is good and our land will yield its increase.

Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps away. my friend, as we begin a new year, we need to make Psalm 85 our prayer.

The prayer for our congregation, the prayer for the church in 2019. Because what Psalm 85 is teaching us, teaching us to plead and to pray to our covenant king, Lord, restore us, revive us and redeem us.

Lord, restore us, revive us and redeem us. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, give to us a burden, we pray, for our congregation and for our community, that Lord, we would plead for them, that we would plead for ourselves, that we would be awakened from our slumber, that thou, Lord, wouldest bring us, O Lord, to thee, to realise that we need to be revived in and of ourselves, we cannot do it, we cannot do it by self, but Lord, we plead that by thy spirit, that thou wouldest bring us, bring us, Lord, to this place where we are revived, where we are restored, and Lord, that through it, that more and more will be redeemed, that more will come and know this Jesus, all that many would be saved, for thou art one who is mighty to save.

[35 : 42] Lord, we plead that thine arm that is not shortened, we plead that it would save, that thou wouldest save to the uttermost. Hear us, Lord, we pray, for our homes and our families, for those whom we love, that they would come to a saving knowledge of our covenant king, the Lord Jesus Christ, and Lord, we pray that thou wouldest bless us then, bless us in the day that is being given to us, a day of rest, help us to rest and to wait patiently upon thee, do us good then, we pray, take away our iniquity, receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

We'll bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of that psalm, Psalm 85, the closing words from verse 8 down to the end of the psalm.

Psalm 85, it's on page 340, from verse 8, I'll hear what God the Lord will speak, to his folk he'll speak peace, and to his saints but let them not return to foolishness, to them that fear him surely near is his salvation, that glory in our land may have her habitation.

And we'll sing on down to the end of the psalm, of Psalm 85, to God's praise. I'll hear what God the Lord will speak, to his folk he'll speak peace, and to their sins and let them not return to foolishness.

To them not fear him truly near, this is salvation, that glory in our land may have her habitation who's met with mercy see righteousness and peace is pure to our lead to strength from earth and righteousness and righteousness and to heaven and to heaven and high yea what is good the

[39 : 09] Lord shall shall give our land shall yield and peace justice to set us in his stand shall know before his face the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the

fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more.
Amen. Amen.