

The Vine

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Preacher: Steve Ellacott

[0 : 00] Hello and welcome to our pre-recorded service for Sunday the 18th of April! This service is brought to you by Calvary Church Brighton. My name is Steve Ellacott and I'm one of the Deacons.

If you're not a local, Brighton is a city on the south coast of the UK, directly south of London. Our congregation in normal times is about 70 to 80 people and if you're one of our regulars, then thank you for joining with us in this virtual way, even though we would prefer to meet in person.

If you're not part of our regular congregation, then a particular welcome. I trust you will find something helpful in these extraordinary times. Let's start our time together with a prayer.

Father, as we come to you, we acknowledge that you are holy and constant, but we are not. We praise you for your holiness, even as it shows up our own inadequacies.

We've thought the wrong things and done the wrong things. Perhaps in this time of pandemic we've thought too much of our own comfort and safety, not the comfort and safety of others.

[1 : 13] So let us remind ourselves of those words of Paul. Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant.

Father, teach us to have that attitude in times of stress, remembering the suffering that Jesus endured for us. We pray this so that suffering might be eased, but even more so that Jesus will be glorified.

So we pray for governments and powers as your word commands us to do. We pray that the rich nations might understand the need to provide vaccines and help for poorer countries, and that supplies might become available for all.

We pray for our other needs as a church, particularly the need for future ministry as Pastor Philip wishes to step back. We acknowledge our need of your help.

And at the same time, we thank you for the service that Philip has given to you and to the church over many decades, and indeed continues to do so now. And we pray that as we plan to reopen our building on 25th of April, that this will be done safely, and that as we recommence meeting, we may find favour with God and with our city.

[2 : 38] We lift up to you our sister churches in Brighton. We remember particularly New Life Brighton, Park Hill and Ebenezer. But we lift up to you every church in our city that seeks to hold out the light of life in a dark time.

May the message of Jesus Christ shine out. So lift our hearts up to you now as we meditate, sing and study your word. Bless our time together.

And may we be like that tree planted by the water that gives fruit in due season. For we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen. Well, this week we're taking a look at Psalm 80.

Psalm 80 is obviously a song. So I thought it might be helpful to spend a few minutes thinking about songs. My problem, though, is that I'm a terrible singer.

So I'm not going to make my point by actually trying to sing some of these songs. You don't have to use your imagination. But the Bible contains many songs. In fact, one whole book is described as the song of songs, which is Solomon's.

[3 : 49] If you've never read it, it's a kind of short opera. What is a song? What distinguishes a song from prose or poetry?

Why do we write songs? Singing seems to be a universal human phenomenon. Different cultures have different styles of music and song. But all cultures seem to sing.

People write songs for all sorts of reasons. There are songs that will help you learn grammar or mathematics. There are songs that will help you recite the chemical elements or the kings and queens of England, or indeed the books of the Bible.

For these, the rhythm and melody serve as an aid to memory. Then there are work songs like such as sea shanties. The song helps people work together.

It gives rhythm to the task and lightens the load of labour. And there are ceremonial songs. Who ever heard of a coronation without music?

[4 : 50] The song establishes the mood of the proceedings and it gives them a sense of grandeur and majesty. Anybody who's heard Handel's aria, Zadok the priest, understands how it's used to create a sense of excitement and expectancy.

There are songs about great events and there are songs about everyday life. Marriage is a particularly popular subject, but people have different views on it.

So Frank Sinatra sang love and marriage, love and marriage go together like a horse on carriage.

Or by contrast, how about this one? You could be a vestal virgin, take the veil and be a nun.

But don't get married girls, for marriage is no fun. This latter song was interestingly enough written by a man, Leon Russellson.

But for both these songs, words and music combine to provoke both thought and emotion. A song needs an appropriate melody to establish its message.

[5 : 55] There's a radio show called I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue. And it has a game in which the participants sing the words of one song to the tune of another.

The result, as you can imagine, is usually both ludicrous and hilarious. There are songs of everyday life. And then there are songs of transcendence.

Songs which aim to look below the surface detail of reality to the meaning underneath. Amongst these are worship songs. Of course, these vary greatly in content and in style and even musical genre.

They depend on cultural norms and what the author wants to convey. The first sight plain song may seem to have little in common with Hillsong. Yet actually, they both have the same purpose.

Words, rhythm, melody, harmony, all work together to lift both our thoughts and feelings above what we might otherwise struggle to express.

[6 : 57] And because we tend to remember songs or poetry more than prose, these songs come to mind when we need them. So before we turn to our study, we will sing two worship songs, which are actually explicitly about singing.

So as you sing, concentrate, of course, on the words, but also be conscious of the way each song establishes a mood. One is reflective and one is triumphant.

We're going to sing from the praise book, first of all, 403, my song is love unknown. And then 98a, sing to God new songs of worship.

My song is love unknown.

My Savior's love for me. Love to the loveless, show that they might love me be.

[8 : 06] But who am I that for my sake, my Lord should take frail flesh and die?

Love to the loveless, show that they may be. He came from heaven's throne, salvation to this stone. But they refused and none that longed for Christ would know. This is my friend, my friend indeed, who at my need his life did spend.

Sometimes they'd shout his way, and his sweet praises sing.

Resounding all the day, and his sweet praises sing. Resounding all the day, and his sweet praises sing. Resounding all the day, and his sweet praises sing. Then crucify is all their breath, and for his death we thirst and cry.

[9 : 30] Why, what has my Lord done to cause this rage and spite?

He made the lame to one, and gave the blind their sight. What victories, yet these are why, the Lord rose high so truly die.

With cries of rage they have, my dear Lord done away.

A murder that they save, the prince of life they slay. Yet steadfast he to suffering goes, that these his foes may be set free.

In life no house, no home, my Lord on earth might have.

[10 : 58] In death no family too, but what a stranger gave. What may I say, heaven was his home, but mind the tooth wherein he lay.

psalms this is much more of an art song carefully constructed restrained precise in language contrasted with the irony of one over the top image of the vine the weeping that you find in laments gets only one verse in this psalm in verse five and even there it's couched in simile the psalm invites us not so much to despair but rather to observe and then to reason and then to pray even the heading seems anomalous at first we don't have the actual tune lilies of the covenant but the tune title suggests a mood of serene beauty apparently not what we find in this psalm yet actually confidence in the beauty of the covenant god is actually the basis for the song so what is the historical event which prompted this psalm the scepter again the greek translation of the old testament adds to the title the words a psalm concerning the assyrian even if this is not part of the original text the clues in this psalm would point us to the fall of the northern kingdom rather than any immediate threat to judah itself the references to the previously powerful northern tribes of ephraim and manasseh and the reference to the one vine in verses eight to thirteen suggests an emphasis on the broken unity of israel which occurred after the death of solomon the title credits the psalm to the asaph choir perhaps the author is a temple musician in the choir or as some have suggested it might have been written by refugees fleeing the assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom the esv actually translates the heading as according to lily's a testimony but either way the work has the fingerprints of a professional poet and songwriter the most obvious sign of this careful construction is the repeated refrain which we find explicitly in verses three seven and nineteen and hinted at in verses four and fourteen in the refrain itself we have a simple reference to god in verse three in verse seven we get god almighty or more literally in fact god of armies and in verse 19 the covenant name lord yahweh is added asking god to intervene on the basis of his covenant but notice the full title is also used in verse four reminding us that the covenant also invokes penalties the word used for anger in verse four actually carries the meaning of a smoldering smoky fire which contrasts with the shining of verse 19 which face is it that god is showing us and of course the refrain in verses three seven and nine breaks the psalm into three sections verses one to two introduce the problem the middle section from four to six summarizes the situation and in verses eight to sixteen we have an extended metaphor of the vine which moves into a prayer for god to act in verses seventeen and eighteen culminating in the final repetition of the refrain in verse nineteen

so let's take a look at these sections in detail so in verses one to three we have the description of the sons of israel the term shepherd is often applied to the king but here it refers to god in himself just as was used by jacob also known as israel of course in genesis 48 15 where we read the following then jacob blessed joseph and said may the god before whom my fathers abraham and isaac walked the god who has been my shepherd all my life to this day the angel who has delivered me from all harm may he bless these boys may they be called by the name my name and the names of my fathers abraham and isaac and may they increase greatly upon the earth of course the boys referred to here are his two grandsons ephraim and manasseh our psalm adds to the list of joseph and his sons the name benjamin who was joseph's full brother joseph and benjamin were the sons of jacob's favorite wife rachel as we read in genesis 46 verse 1 so these verses assert the unity of god's people note the word us in verse 2 and yet there is also an irony here the tribes of ephraim and manasseh did indeed increase greatly as in jacob's blessing when the kingdom split after the death of solomon they became the dominant forces in the northern kingdom of israel to the extent that sometimes the whole kingdom was referred to as ephraim and when the isaac threat had started to grow king hezekiah of judah had invited the northern tribes to jerusalem but ephraim and manasseh had poured scorn on the invitation we read of this in 2 chronicles 30 verse 10 after the assyrian invasion the northern tribes more or less ceased to exist as separate entities benjamin by contrast had remained loyal to the house of david when the kingdom split yet by this time it had been more or less assimilated into judah and so the descendants of jacob's favorite wife were scattered only in judah was the line of jacob still strong and yet the we of verse 3 clearly includes all the tribes with a lot of complicated politics the psalmist compresses into these few sentences so what is the situation again so much is compressed into these very few words in verses 4 to 6 the penalty of the covenant has been invoked because of the northern tribes idolatry and disobedience verse 4 verse 16 echo deuteronomy 29 and 30 instead of brightness there is the smoke of anger instead of the abundant provision of the land flowing with milk and honey the only sustenance of the people is tears verse 5 just as predicted by moose these tears come from the lord but the enemies of god's people are fighting over the pickings verse 6 again this was just as predicted by moose in deuteronomy 29 22 to 28 moose curse has come true what more is there to say nothing more than the refrain but after the terseness of the first two sections the psalmist suddenly gives his poetic

imagination free reign

with this totally extravagant metaphor of the vine how big is a grapevine maybe a couple of metres tall three or four metres spread yet this vine towers over the great cedars spreads across the mountaintops it spreads from the mediterranean to the euphrates the greatest extent of the kingdom of israel was during the reign of solomon even then it did not spread quite as far as this picture there is a certain hyperbole here but notice this is a single vine under solomon it was a united kingdom before the schism that tore the now threatened northern tribes from the house of david at last the psalmist gives some reign to his emotions in this nostalgia for a vanished golden age but now he mourns the wall is broken passes by can help themselves to the fruit and the animals ravage where once was careful cultivation but what does the psalmist see as the ultimate cause of this devastation was it the enmity between the non-rivalry between the northern and southern kingdoms was it the assyrian threat was it some other enemy these things may have caused the damage but look at verses 8, 9 and 12 it was god who planted and cultivated the vine in verses 8 and 9 and for the psalmist it was god who broke down the wall it was god who burnt the vine and it is god who burned it verse 16 your vine is cut down it is burned with fire at your rebuke your people perish as the psalmist has already noticed this destruction is nothing more than the outworking of moses curse the due rebuke for a faithless people who have abandoned the covenant but what god has torn down god can re-establish that gives the psalmist cause for hope as we read in verses 14 and 15 kingdoms can rise and fall but the kingdom of god always has life the vine is damaged but it is not dead there is still a branch verse 15 there's a play on words here that we miss in translation the word for branch in verse 15 is not the one used in verse 10 rather a hebrew word is used which can mean either a branch or a son of course the vine is a common metaphor for israel in the old testament but israel is not really a plant it's a living kingdom a human kingdom as it is described in verse 17 the context here suggests that the son of man refers not to a particular king but to the nation and yet there is more to be said on this but before we turn to that let's ask the question what happened next well here's a bit of history what was the result of the psalmist's prayer the northern kingdoms were pretty much exterminated by the assyrians between 734 and 722 bc this of course left judah dangerously exposed and in 701 bc lachish judah's second city fell to assyrian attack

[30:10] there's an ancient assyrian freeze in the british museum which you can go and see today which commemorates this but remarkably jerusalem itself did not fall as two chronicles described it we read king hezekiah and the prophet isaiah son of amos cried out in prayer to heaven about this and the lord sent an angel who annihilated all the fighting men and the leaders and officers in the camp of the assyrian king so he withdrew to his own land in disgrace and when he went into the temple of his god some of his sons cut him down with a sword so the lord saved hezekiah and the people of jerusalem for the hand of sennacherib king of assyria from the hand of all others he took care of them on every side many brought offerings to jerusalem for the lord for the lord and valuable gifts for hezekiah king of judah from then on he was highly regarded by all the nations you might imagine that he was highly regarded having survived an assyrian invasion there was even a certain prosperity around the last years of hezekiah's reign as two chronicles suggest god's hand was indeed on the king and kingdom just as the psalmist had prayed in verse 17 of psalm 80 yet it was not to last there were a few ups but more downs in 587 bc jerusalem was destroyed by the babylonians yet even that was not the end from 688 bc onwards the exiles returned in ways to jerusalem and although it took many years the city and the temple were rebuilt but it never returned to the glory of solomon's reign more ups and downs followed so to cut a long story short the city eventually found itself under roman rule but then came one who would claim that title of the branch of david the son of man for himself in matthew 13 we read the son of man will send out his angels and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil in chapter 19 of matthew jesus said to them i tell you the truth at the renewal of all things when the son of man sits on his glorious throne you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of israel and then in chapter 26 of matthew when jesus is on trial the high priest said to him i charge you under oath by the living god tell us if you are the christ the son of god yes it is as you say jesus replied but i say to all of you in the future you will see the son of man sitting at the right hand of the mighty one and coming of the clouds of heaven jesus is the one who gathers the refugees luke 19 verse 10 says for the son of man came to seek and to save what is lost and he is the one who feeds the hungry john 6 27 do not work for food that spoils but for food that endures to eternal life which the son of man will give you on him god the father has placed his seal of approval the true fulfillment

of the son of man in psalm 80 is jesus himself and what about

the vine jesus claims that title also just as the northern tribes were cut off from israel jesus tells us i am the true vine my father is the gardener he who cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful you are already clean because of the word i've spoken to you remain in me and i will remain in you no branch can bear fruit by itself it must remain in the vine neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me i am the vine said jesus you are the branches if a man remains in me and i in him he will bear much fruit apart from me you can do nothing if anyone does not remain in me he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers such branches are picked up thrown into the fire and burned if you remain in me and my words remain in you ask whatever you wish and it will be given you this is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples that's john 15 1 to 8 notice the way it echoes the words of psalm 80 and so the psalmist prayed restore us oh lord god almighty make your face shine upon us that we may be saved the final fulfillment of the prayer is found not in the old covenant with moses curse but in the new covenant established by the son of man the vine regrown from the branch of david is more glorious even than the kingdom of solomon it reaches not just to the treetops but into heaven itself and it spreads not just from the euphrates to the mediterranean but throughout the world but like the covenant of moses it does have both a curse and a blessing here is the curse john 15 6 if anyone does not remain in me he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers such branches are picked up thrown into the fire and burned just like those branches in psalm 80 the gardener does not tolerate dead branches any more than he did the rebellious northern kingdom sometimes a drastic pruning is required if the plant is to stay healthy but there is also a blessing if you remain in me and my words remain in you ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you this is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples so what is the application of this to us today well it's simple enough isn't it if we wish to be disciples of

Jesus we must be careful to remain in the vine and bring forth fruit beware that we are not those unfruitful branches that are sawn off and burned so let's echo that prayer of the psalmist restore us O Lord God Almighty make your face shine upon us that we may be saved now let's sing Israel shepherd hear our prayer leading Joseph by your care throne between the cherubim light for us as once for him wake and all your mighty powers

Israel shepherd brought the ours restore us now O God we pray and make your face shine on our ways restore us that we may be saved!

God of hosts O Lord how long will your wrath be burning strong you were anchored by our prayers feeding us the bread of tears to our neighbors we bring strife while our foes deride our life restore us God of hosts we pray and make your face shine on our way restore us that we may be saved out of

[40 : 18] Egypt's land you brought one choice thine and set apart planted it and cleared the ground kept it till it filled the land mountains nestled in its shade coast to coast its branches spread!

Lord why now destroy her hedge strangers strip her foliage!

Forest animals make free God of hosts look down and see bless from heaven this chosen root as a father got its fruit!

Now your vine is cut and burnt like the flock your wrath has stirred touch again your chosen son first born raised for you alone that we turn not back to shame but for life we plead your name with life restore Lord God our hosts shine on us so we are not lost and save us to the utter most rest time.