

God's Way of Salvation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 January 2024

Preacher: Mark Chew

- [0:00] I do turn back to Psalm 80 on page 586 or 585 as we look at that Psalm today. We're continuing in our series over summer in the Psalms.
- I'm going to begin with a question which I believe everyone, not just musicians, will know the answer to. And the question is this, when you look at a song or a hymn, how do you tell which is the chorus?
- I'm looking for audience participation here. Repetition, yes, very good. Right answer. It's the lines or lyrics that are repeated, isn't it?
- Again, each stanza or verse is different, but the chorus or sometimes called the refrain are the same sets of words that we repeat after each stanza.
- Often that's the part of the choir, so that's the chorus, that's why we call it the chorus. Whereas the stanza is the part that sometimes a soloist might sing. So if you apply this to Psalm 80, you can see the structure in this psalm, can't you?
- [1:16] Again, audience participation. Can you see where the chorus is in the psalm? Have a look. Anyone? Yes, correct. Which verses are they?
19. Correct. So there are, the chorus is repeated three times, isn't it? And the words are actually identical except for a small difference, which we'll get to in a minute or at the end.
- So look at verse 3. As Ben was saying, Restore us, O God. Make your face shine on us that we may be saved. These are the words that come after each stanza.
- Now you'll notice that the third stanza, which runs from verses 8 to 16, it's actually three times longer than the first two stanzas, isn't it? It's almost like an extended bridge, if you like.
- The climax of the song, so you have to go for longer. So it's not hard to work out what the main point of this psalm is. It's the chorus. A cry for God to restore the people of Israel.
- [2:28] Save us, they plead. By making your face, God shine on us. Well, we're going to unpack this as we go, but let's begin with the first stanza, where the psalmist pleads for God to hear.
- So verse 4. 1. Hear us, shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock, you who sit enthroned between the cherubim. Shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh.
- Awaken your might, come and save us. And the chorus. Restore us, O God. Make your face shine on us that we may be saved. So our first image in the psalm is that of God as shepherd.
- Interestingly, he's said to lead Joseph like a flock, even though he's the shepherd of Israel. Now, Joseph, you might know, is merely the father of the two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, whereas Israel is the father of all 12 tribes.
- And some have wondered why this might be the case. Is it because the psalmist is just referring to the northern kingdom? Because sometimes that northern kingdom, when the kingdom was split between north and south after King Solomon, the northern kingdom is described as Ephraim, whereas the south described as Judah, because the two tribes in the south were Judah and Benjamin.

[3:48] Now, I think the rest of the psalm makes it clear that he's not just talking about the northern kingdom, because all 12 tribes were rescued from Egypt, not just the 10. What I think then is going on is that because the exodus, and you would have noticed already that the exodus from Egypt plays such a prominent role in the psalms, it was actually God, if you remember, who first led Joseph from the promised land to Egypt, didn't he?

It was then also God that first chose, or rather that God chose then Joseph to save his brothers while there was this famine. And so Egypt, you see, is the place where God has led them to and from the promised land.

It's what's in view in the next few verses. And so Joseph, symbolically, is that leader. And so God is said to lead Joseph collectively, all of Israel, like a flock.

But as we look at the next few verses, God is described as sitting enthroned between the cherubim. Those are the two angels that actually sit on top of the Ark of the Covenant.

And the Ark itself symbolizes God's presence with Israel. The psalmist then asks for God to shine forth before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh.

[5:13] And your next question, I'm pretty sure, is, why these three tribes? What makes them so special? It does appear odd, but I think the answer comes by looking at the book of Numbers in chapter 2 and verse 18.

You see, whenever Israel broke camp in the wilderness and they started to set out on their journey to Canaan, there was a precise order in which they were to follow.

It's like when I used to go on school excursions many, many decades ago. Nowadays, I don't know, is it pretty random now still?

As long as you walk two by two, is that right? But, you know, if you look at that photo, I picked randomly somehow, found a picture of a school from India. I think the teacher, in this case, has paired them up so that the guys are on the right and the girls are on the left.

I think that's what's happening. But back in my day, I would remember that the teacher would arrange us by height order. Yep, the tallest at the back. And today I found out that actually, it was so that the teacher can still see everyone, you know, from the front.

[6:29] Whereas if you put the tall students from the front, you can't see the little ones at the back. So it makes sense. But in Israel's case, when they were lined up, on the procession, what would happen is that the Ark of the Tabernacle, in Numbers chapter 2, you would read, is actually right in the middle, carried by the Levites.

So you'd get six tribes in front, six tribes behind. And that was to show that God was right in their midst. The twelve tribes actually were divided into four sections, right?

As they were camping north, south, east, west. Three tribes in each section. And so two sections would go in front of the Ark, and two sections would follow the Ark.

And here, guess what the three tribes were that were in the third section. Just a guess, anyone? You're not going to get it wrong.

It's in there, in the verse 3. Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, right? So the psalmist here, what he's trying to do is to bring God, to bring the whole of Israel back to envision this very same procession of God leading Israel back to Canaan.

[7:50] Now, of course, as he's writing Psalm 80, this is not happening literally because Israel is already in Canaan, aren't they? But what the psalmist is asking God to do is to come back with him to the time of the Exodus and remind God what actually happened then.

That God had allowed his glory to shine brightly in their midst. That God had used his mighty power to save them time and time again from their enemies, from thirst, from hunger.

But now, that does not appear to be the case. Now, God appears to be sleeping or at least his power is. So the psalmist is saying, wake up, God.

Which reminds me a bit like the Wiggles. Remember Purple Wiggle? Jeff? Wake up, Jeff? Yeah. Wake up, God. Now, we're not told what the exact danger of Israel is, but it is odd, isn't it, for a shepherd to be ignoring the bleating of his sheep.

In fact, I would say it's a dereliction of a shepherd's duty, isn't it? That's the one job that a shepherd has, to protect the sheep and care for them. And yet, God seems to be failing in his duty, which is unimaginable.

[9:05] Well, Israel is crying for help and nothing seems to be happening. And I wonder whether sometimes you feel like that as well, when, for example, your prayers to God go unanswered.

And you almost want to say, God, wake up. Can't you see that I'm in trouble? Now, you can understand if Israel had been ignoring God. Yeah, sure, God doesn't need to act there.

But the psalmist and perhaps all the people have been crying to God for help. Why is God not responding? And as we now see in verses 4-7, the second stanza, this has been going on, it seems, for some time because we hear the cry, how long?

How long, verse 4, Lord God Almighty, will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people? You have fed them with the bread of tears. You have made them drink tears by the bowlful.

You have made us an object of derision to our neighbors and our enemies mock us. Chorus, restore us, God Almighty. Make your face shine on us that we may be saved.

[10:12] And so, the psalmist's conclusion is that God must be angry at them. And as we read, it's a smoldering kind of anger. I don't know if I remember Dr. Smolder Bravestone in Jumanji, you know, the next level.

One of his strengths right at the bottom is smoldering intensity, isn't it? He can disarm his enemies just with the power of his silent stare.

God's smoldering anger, that's what it is. It's his apparent silence in spite of the people's prayer that demonstrates his smoldering anger.

Now again, if you've been coming on Wednesdays to the Summer Bible Studies, Peter Adam has been saying time and time again that God loves to hear us pray. And yet, in this psalm, we have this incongruous tort, isn't it?

How can God be angry at his people for praying to him? So much so that God as their shepherd is feeding them not with refreshing water.

[11:18] So, here's the image again, that they're on the road, the journey, the exodus, and you remember God, how God had provided them with water time and time again. Well, here, God is feeding them, not with refreshing water, but asking them to drink from their own tears by the bowlful.

These are bowlful tears. Again, a contrast, isn't it, to God in Exodus. And so, now we're not just speaking of tears of suffering, but tears of rejection by God as well.

And then, to add to that, we have the derision of the neighbors in verse 6. The surrounding nations are looking on and mocking. They're saying, you pray to this God that is almighty and, you know, doesn't even answer you.

What kind of God do you have? And so, to add to their suffering and rejection, what they now have is humiliation as well. And so, we get to the third stanza.

The psalmist pleads by drawing out in detail what God has allowed to happen. Now, notice throughout the psalm, I don't know whether you've picked up, God has been addressed exclusively in the second person.

[12:31] Sometimes in the psalm, you'll see God being addressed in the third person. But no, here, the psalmist is pleading directly to God. You, so verse 8, you transplanted a vine from Egypt.

You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty seethers with its branches.

Its branches reach as far as the sea, it shoots as far as the river. Why have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass by pick its grapes? Boars from the forest ravage it, and insects from the fields feed on it.

And so here we have another change of image. Israel has gone from being God's flock to being his vine. But again, it's the exodus that's being described, isn't it?

Now, it's when they've returned or they've gone back into the land. Israel is not a new vine, it's a transplanted vine, which means they were really God's people in Egypt, but God took them as a whole vine and planted them in the land of promise in order to take root.

[13:37] And interestingly, if you want to go back, if you look at Genesis chapter 49 and verse 22, Jacob, you remember, blessed his sons at his death bed, and when he blessed Joseph, he described Joseph as a fruitful vine.

It's interesting, isn't it? Whose branches climb over a wall. And Joseph himself is able to repel his enemies because the mighty hand of God, which we'll read again later on, the mighty hand of God of Israel, their shepherd, was with them.

So again, God is being reminded, isn't he, of what he has done. Look how much effort you put into us, God. Back in the day, your power rescued us from slavery.

Your power guided us through the Red Sea and the wilderness, drove out nations more powerful than us, so that we, as your vine, can take root and multiply.

I actually have a vine growing over our garage door. I've got a picture of it on the next slide. There you go. No grapes, unfortunately, no wine, but as you can see from its shoots and branches, it's a rather prolific vine, isn't it?

[14:52] Can you even tell where the door is? Yeah, it's actually behind the vine. So I constantly have to fight my way past the vine in order to get into my garage, which means I don't go in that often.

But that's exactly how God has prospered Israel, isn't it? So prolific are they that they metaphorically, and we read, cover the mountains by its shed.

Imagine that. How does a vine cover the mountain? It doesn't work, does it? The mighty cedars, tall trees that they are, are being covered by the branches of this vine.

Now all of this is all hyperbole of course, but you get the point. Israel, God has so multiplied and made Israel fruitful that it's filled the land. Verse 11, from the Mediterranean Sea to the river, which incidentally that's not the river Jordan, it's the river Euphrates, which is all the way to the east, isn't it?

But then verse 12, God has allowed his hard work to be destroyed. And notice, the psalmist is very intentional in saying that it's God's doing, isn't it?

[16:06] But that's right, isn't it? Because if God is sovereign, then everything that occurs, occurs under his hand. And that's the presupposition throughout the entire psalm. God is the one who's doing all this.

God planted them, but God is also the one that's now leaving them exposed to be picked off by predators and thieves. Now the reference here to broken walls could be literally of the walls of Jerusalem, which were torn down when Judah went into exile.

But as I said, because this whole description is of all of Israel, I think the walls here are sort of figurative. Thus, if you remember the history when the Assyrians attacked from the north in 722 BC and then the Babylonians to the south in 587 BC took many of the tribes away, that's the picture here, isn't it?

It's as though they were like the boars and the insects ravaging, climbing over the broken walls and then leaving a desolation in their wake. That's the bleak picture that we have in this psalm.

Israel has been truly ravaged, broken, torn down. But even in the midst of all that, the psalmist does not lose hope because he knows that if God is in control, then he can turn things around.

[17:28] And so in verse 14, he pleads, return to us, God Almighty, look down from heaven and see, watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself.

God, remember, you planted us, you raised us up from scratch. And so if you've done it once before, you can do it again. And interestingly, the word for return, return to us, God Almighty, that Hebrew word is the same as restore.

So essentially, the psalmist is praying the same thing. He wants God to return things or restore things back to where they were, to the original state where Israel is again this fruitful vine, laden with grapes, blessed by God, surrounded by this protective and impenetrable wall.

Sounds good, but how is all this to occur? Well, we're told that in the last part of this final stanza, verse 16 to 19. So, the psalmist says, yes, your vine, remember, it's your vine again, your vine, God, is cut down, it is burned with fire, and your rebuke, your people perish, but let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

Then we will not turn away from you. Revive us and we will call on your name. Restore us, Lord God Almighty, make your face shine on us that we may be saved.

[19:04] So, this anger from God is justified because Israel had turned away from God. they rejected his gracious provision and protection, and so Israel, without him, are exposed to the enemies.

They have brought this on themselves, they have no one else to blame. And one of the key reasons why this has occurred is because the psalmist says they have lacked a faithful leader and ruler, someone who will guide Israel in righteousness and faithfulness.

Now, if you go back to verse 15, Israel was the root planted by God's right hand. Can you see? He was the son, that's the nation of Israel, is the son that he raised up for himself.

But now here in verse 18, we see that same phrase used but for someone else, isn't it? That restoration will come when God's hand rests on the man, that's an individual, at his right hand.

Someone anointed by God, the son of man, you have raised up for yourself. This, then, is God's way of salvation. God saves by raising an anointed leader to faithfully lead Israel and restore them.

[20:23] Now, in Israel's history, they've had kings, King David, for example, and a few kings after him, who sort of did that to some extent. But they never did it perfectly.

And more importantly, there was no one who ever did it forever. So, and I know you all know the answer to this, so you need to shout it out in unison. Where will this son of man come from who will guide them, as it says in verse 18, so that they will not turn away from the Lord?

One, two, three. Jesus. Very good. I thought two weeks I'm away and you forget that already. Jesus is that man, isn't it?

Because, and incidentally, Jesus means God saves, doesn't it? Jesus is the one whom Israel and indeed the whole world needs to wait for, the one that God will raise up, the one who sits at God's right hand who will bring salvation.

Jesus is God's way of salvation. And how is Jesus able to do this when no one else can? Well, Jesus himself revealed this to us when he came.

[21 : 35] You see, I don't know whether you've heard, but if you go to some churches or if you hear some people preach today about Christianity, what you may hear is that all you need in order to be saved is to become like Jesus.

That's what it means to follow Jesus. That Jesus is your role model and if you live like him and follow him, you will be saved. That's the sum total of Christianity.

Jesus as exemplar. But Jesus, when he came, said this was not enough, not by a long shot. Instead, salvation can only come by Jesus fulfilling this psalm.

How? Firstly, there are three things. Firstly, by Jesus being the shepherd of Israel. And that's why we read from John chapter 10 because on the next slide, Jesus says, I am the good shepherd.

And what does the good shepherd do? He lays down his life for his sheep. Now, I've said in the past, particularly over Christmas, the sheep don't follow their shepherd by becoming like him, do they?

[22 : 48] No, they follow the shepherd by depending on him. And that's what we do with Jesus. Jesus saves us by laying down his life for us. We don't do that.

he takes on the punishment for Israel and for us, thereby fulfilling the need for righteousness before God. So, Jesus is our shepherd.

But secondly, Jesus is also the vine in Psalm 80. And again, we don't have time to look at this, but if you look at John chapter 15, Jesus teaches that he's the true vine.

And, just as it is here in Psalm 80, he, even though he's the true vine, had to first be cut down because of the sin of the people. God allowed his son to be ravaged and broken down on account of the people's rebellion.

But then, thirdly, God is also the son of man in verse 17, raised up by God himself to lead God's people by faith so that they will turn away from their sin and turn to God and call on him in faith.

[24 : 00] And so, as God's people, we remain in Christ, the true vine, in order to be restored and saved as Christ's face then shines on us. Now, friends, I don't know whether you've been crying out to God.

You may not be calling to the God of Israel like the psalmist. Maybe you've not experienced God's rescue or salvation in the past like Israel did. And yet, the way to God and to salvation is still found only in Jesus.

God's only way of salvation and restoration is in his son, Jesus. Now, I want you to have a look now at the chorus because I did say that there was one change each time, isn't it?

So, as you look at verse 3, verse 7, and verse 19, tell me, what is the one thing that changes in that chorus? Anyone? Anyone? It's, I know you know Michelle, tell me.

Correct, God's name. So, first we have just God, isn't it? He's the creator, somewhere, relationship with the psalmist unknown. Then, in the second chorus, he's God almighty.

[25 : 13] That is, the psalmist now recognizes that God is the only one with the power to save. But then, finally, in the third chorus, he's the Lord God almighty, Lord, the covenant name of God, but also the one to whom Israel submits.

The psalmist recognizes that salvation only comes when we acknowledge that God is Lord, someone who has entered into relationship with us, but to whom we have to submit.

And the way God saves us is by providing his son as the Messiah to lay down his life for us, the sheep, so that then we can turn away from sin, turn to the Lord and call on his name.

There is one more final thing that I want to pick out in this psalm, and that is, this psalm is not a save me psalm, this is a save us psalm, can you see?

That is, the psalmist does not cry for his individual salvation, but for the corporate salvation of the people of God. Yes, God hears us as individuals, he sees our suffering as individuals, but when salvation comes, it comes by God gathering us as a flock, one flock only, which Jesus is the shepherd of.

[26 : 35] So there is only one church, one body of Christ, and when God saves us, he brings us into the protection of that flock. And so if you as a believer, you're struggling in your faith, struggling with why God is not listening, let me encourage you, do not isolate yourself from the flock, but rather come under the care of Jesus, the protection of Jesus, as part of his flock, which is his church.

I know it's tempting sometimes when things are bad just to stay away, but actually the way God will minister to you, the way God will feed you, the way God will bless you, is by you being part of the flock and allowing the other members of his body, Christ's body, to serve you and minister to you.

We may not do it perfectly, but that is God's means of grace and provision for you. So let me encourage us to do that this year, us here at HDD, but also later on down at St.

John's, as one body in Christ, to come together and find God's salvation and restoration in his son. Let's pray. Father, thank you for sending us the Son of Man, raised up to be our shepherd, restored as the true vine in whom we can remain and abide.

Help us not to be like Israel, not to turn away from you, but to continually call upon your name and to obey your voice. In Jesus' name we pray.

[28 : 09] Amen.