

O God, Our Hope in Ages Past

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[0 : 00] Four things to note in this first half of the psalm. Our God, the hope of ages past.

See, that's the great thing about God. He has a history. There are things that God has done. And that's the first thing we want to look at, the historical fact.

Historical fact. And when we think about the things that God has done, sometimes they'll be to do with people, a group of people, a church, sometimes individuals.

But it's God who has done these things. They are part of his history and they are part of our history. They will be named as such.

Historical facts. And then that leads to personal results. Because when God does something, if he does something for us, obviously that's going to change us.

[1 : 04] When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Our mouth was filled with laughter. Our tongues with joy. See, when God does something, it's not just ordinary.

It's extraordinary. It's extraordinary. And there are some things that he does that are really so extraordinary that you feel this is amazing.

It affects you. You're like those who dream. You're filled with laughter, with shouts of joy. And there are some things that the Lord does it actually leaves a public impact.

In other words, even people who haven't been touched by that work themselves, they've only looked on from the outside. They've been able to say, wow, the Lord has done great things for them.

Not us, but the Lord has done great things for them. So it's affected them. There's been a public impact.

[2 : 14] But it doesn't stop there. When we hear of that public impact, it makes us think again and leads to believing confession.

The Lord has done great things for us. We are glad. So historical fact, personal result, public impact, believing confession.

I think that's what we find in this first half of the psalm, thinking of our God, our hope in the ages past. I was jokingly saying to Megan yesterday, when we were having lunch together, before her wonderful lecture at DTS, I was saying, I'm afraid I'm preaching on the psalms again tomorrow, but it'll give Jim an opportunity to give me a summary of it in a wonderful hymn, because he's got this gift of remembering hymns beautifully.

And I am always steeped in these words here, but our God, our hope in ages past, I believe that's got a historical ring to it as a hymn.

So historical fact, personal result, public impact, believing confession. Let's think about the historical fact first. Here's the psalmist saying, when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion.

[3 : 40] This is God turning things back. Things were going one way, then the Lord did something, he intervened, and he turned things around.

That word fortunes is not my favorite word at all for translating this, but I understand what it means. There are some translations that would use when God restored our captivity.

And this is thinking perhaps of when Israel was in exile because of their sins, and then God brought them back from their captivity, restored them back to their own land.

But it's likely that the word is not just captivity, it's talking about something more general, and restoring our fortunes is one way of thinking of that.

See, there are some situations that we are in, and only God can bring us out of that situation. There are some things that we're in, and we can help ourselves.

[4 : 49] But there are situations in which you are placed, sometimes because of the sins of others. I mean, when you think of what's going on in the Ukraine just now, how awful it is.

How many more images can you bear? All of us go to our phones or whatever. First thing, and we want to see what's been happening. And you think hundreds more killed.

And so many soldiers killed. And so many young Russian soldiers killed. And you think, this is awful. And you think, this is just terrible.

And you think, why is this happening? And undoubtedly, most of us would say, well, the sins of others have caused this to happen.

At least, that's one of the reasons why it has taken place. The sins of others have brought terrible situations into the lives of families and communities.

[5 : 51] Didn't you hear one lady talking about his Mariupol? One lady who was leaving it, she says, there is no Mariupol anymore. It's been flat.

Imagine how terrible that situation is. But that's only one example of where some people suffer because of the arrogance and the sins of others.

We suffer because of the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden. He did something. He did something along with Eve in the Garden of Eden.

And it's affected every human being that ever came into the world since then. He chose to disobey God.

Led by his wife, we have to say. But together, they disobeyed God. Eve wasn't the head of the human race. Adam was.

[6 : 58] And he chose to sin. And it affected his wife. And it affected the whole of humanity born from Adam and Eve after that.

And only God's intervention can restore the situation. Only God can bring things back. So we suffer because of the sins of others.

We suffer because of the sins of Adam. But we also suffer from our own self-inflicted sins as well. We are the kind of people, we can't just stand back and say, Adam, you're to blame for everything. There are so many things that we have gone on to do. We have sinned. If Adam sinned, original sin, as the confession of faith says.

We have gone on to do actual sins ourselves. And we do it on a daily basis. And when we sin, there are always consequences.

[8 : 08] There were consequences for Adam's sin, and there are consequences for our own particular sins. And again, only God can rescue us.

And this is true for ourselves as individuals, is true for ourselves as families, is true for ourselves as communities, local and national.

Sometimes churches. Churches can go through most difficult times, like it was for Israel in the Old Testament. They were walking with the Lord for a while.

And then they began to turn after other gods, and they began to set up idols. And they began to just give themselves over to the worship of these false gods.

And the kings, the kings who were meant to be God's spokesmen, addressing the people, drawing them back to God, reflecting the character of God, what did they do?

[9 : 08] They led them away from God. It was an awful time. And when God saw that it increased and increased and increased, he did what he did in the days of Noah.

He brought judgment. And they were sent into exile. Do you think that can happen in the 21st century? Can there be a group of the professing people of God, and they can become so worldly? They can become so sinful, so distracted by earthly things, that they really move away from God and his worship and his priorities.

I mentioned the Sabbath there. When we were talking to the children. I remember up north, Kenny MacDonald, who was father of Alison MacDonald.

He was so strong on the Sabbath, the Lord's Day. He says, you lose the Lord's Day, you lose the gospel.

[10 : 21] And that is absolutely true. You lose the Lord's Day, you lose the gospel. If you lose that priority of giving one day to think about him, to meet with his people, to hear under his word, and so on, then there's something very important happening.

Give that up, and you'll soon be giving the gospel up. That seems to be a fact that has been replicated down through history.

So I ask you, is it happening in your own hearts? Are you a people who are maybe suffering from your own sins?

There may be some of you here who aren't yet Christians. And it's great that you're here. It's wonderful. Is it an acknowledgement, though, that you need a work of God in your own life? You need God to intervene, to rescue you. Because without God's intervention, it will never, ever happen. You will never be rescued.

[11:29] You'll never be restored. See, when I read these words, when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, I think, when?

It happened. I think to myself, did it have to happen, though? Will God always intervene to rescue? See, we have to think here, when we talk about God's divine intervention, we're talking about God intervening as king. We're talking about the kingdom of God coming.

We're talking about God entering history in order to turn things back. That's what happened in the kingdom of God when Jesus Christ, as the children said, came into the world.

This is God himself intervening in person to restore a people back to himself. Why? Because there's this need of divine intervention.

[12:34] And only God can do it. We need his right hand to do ever valiantly. We need his plan. We need his provision.

We need his power. But when Jesus came, it wasn't just God's plan. It wasn't just God's provision. It wasn't just God's power.

As Joanne said, it was God in person who came to restore things. See, when Jesus came into this world, history changed forever.

It's wonderful. But you know, down through history, there have been various times when we have seen terrible situations.

Remember the Reformation. Even in Scotland, St. Andrews, there was a cathedral, there was Cardinal Beaton, one of the most ungodly people who ever walked the face of the earth.

[13:45] One of the most ungodly who ruled in the professing church. And he took delight in putting to death those who proclaimed the gospel.

And you think, who could possibly turn things round? Could God possibly intervene? And he did. He intervened when he raised up the likes of George Wishart and Patrick Hamilton and John Knox.

And what happened in Scotland, we read it in our history books, God turned the nation back. He got the nobles to some degree on the side of the church.

And so many of them were godly people, by no means all of them. But we look back and we say, God restored the fortunes of the church in Scotland.

And we are so, so thankful for that. When the state tried to crush the work of God in Scotland, as it did try to do, again, God raised up people who were willing to be steadfast in the faith, who were willing to give their own lives just so that the work of God would continue.

[15:04] I'm reading a volume at the moment on the Covenanters. When we were down in Gatehouse, that was one of the regions where so many of these Covenanters lived.

And they loved the Lord. They loved his worship. They loved his word. But they were trampled on by people, trampled on by evil rulers.

And what happened? The Lord intervened, restored their fortunes, and the Protestant faith was established to some degree in Scotland.

We give thanks for that. We could say the same for the beginning of the free church in the middle of the 19th century. when the church and the state came to loggerheads.

Why? Because the state were saying, you can't have this minister. We want you to have that minister. We're in a vacancy here in Livingston. Imagine that your next minister would be chosen by Boris Johnson.

[16:14] Imagine what it would be like if the state were to say, no, you can't have this man. you'll have to have this person because we like him better.

He would say, no way. We're not going to allow the state to interfere. Well, that's what many people in the 19th century agreed with. And God, I believe, at that time he restored.

He gave courage to many people to abandon their manses and their buildings and to go out and that's when the Church of Scotland free began, the Free Church of Scotland.

That's great. The Lord restored. The Lord turned things back. He does the same in revival power. Times, you know, when the church just, ah, it can die. 1843 to 1863, the Church of Scotland free and many other evangelicals in the Church of Scotland saw wonderful things happen.

[17 : 26] It was beautiful. These were the times when anybody who believed in Christian education would have said, great, great stride. The care for the children, the care for the adults, they want the gospel to be spread.

Ah, wonderful things would happen. Church planting, church buildings, schools, happening everywhere. And you'd have stood back and said, look, the Lord has restored his work in Scotland. But then after that, that's when things began to slip. As it always does, you see, the Lord restores and then we just become familiar with it and we can slip back down.

And we need God's revival. And does God revive? I mean, Megan, her history in Wales and the areas that knew so much revival.

By revival, I'm talking about somebody coming to faith. Tens coming to faith. Hundreds coming to faith. Thousands coming to faith.

[18 : 49] Tens of thousands coming to faith and remaining in the faith. The Lord does that so that you end up having communities in Wales just like you had communities in the Highlands, just like you had communities in the Central Belt permeated by the Gospel of God and the Spirit of God.

I remember listening to a man in Lewis, Duncan, and he was one of those folks who were converted in the Carleby revival on the west coast of Lewis in the 19th century, 1935.

he says, it was amazing. It was absolutely amazing. And that brings you on to that second point here, this personal result.

He says, we were like those who dream, he said. Our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy. He says, see when God brought revival to that part of the island, Carleway, every house in the village seemed to be touched by revival.

People were converted. People were born again. People started to go out to church, started to come into the prayer meeting, and they just weren't interested in only having two services on the Lord's Day and one on the midweek.

[20 : 19] They wanted to gather every night. He says, it was wonderful. There was a lady in my old congregation, Annie MacDonald, in Dingwall.

She also was a product of that revival. She was converted during that revival. And I once said to her, Annie, and the congregation was there, because we were doing a wee talk on revival, and she says, Annie, was it wonderful?

She says, there was nothing like it. It's as if she was saying here, we were like those who dream. You were saying, is this real? So many people converted under the sound of the Word of God. God's intervening. God's at work. And you could see her smile. There was laughter in her voice. Clearly, shouts of joy beyond our wildest dreams.

Is it real? So amazing. Why is it that that wonderful hymn was penned? It's not just called grace. What's it called?

[21 : 30] Amazing grace. Why is it that in the middle of the 21st century, for some reason, grace is no longer thought of as so amazing?

How many of the most beautiful hymns were penned at that time by people who were aware of how amazing that grace was? how great thou art, so filled with a sense of God himself and God's work. We were like those who dream. We dare not allow the world, the flesh, or the devil to work in us and through us to such a degree that we lose the taste of how amazing grace is.

It's sweet. It's beautiful. It's powerful. Who's going to awaken people in Livingston? Year after year, and the years that have been here, we've said to ourselves, we're not touching the community.

We're not touching the houses around us. We're not touching the children's lives. We're not touching the adults. Who can make a difference in this world, in this area, in Elburn and beyond?

[23 : 00] Who can make a difference? Do you think you can do it? I can do it? Not at all. We need none other than the Lord himself to do it.

So that one day we may look back and say, do you remember remember when the Lord restored the fortunes of his people in Livingston, in West Lothian, when God turned things back?

It was amazing, you'll be able to see. My sister-in-law was converted in 2020, during COVID.

God opened the doors of her heart when the doors of the church were closed. It was amazing. She tells us, and it was like this, we were like those who dream.

Really? As I read the text, and I couldn't stop smiling. It was beautiful, beautiful, shouts of joy, laughter.

[24 : 11] Last week, she professed faith last Lord's Day, and I phoned her on Sunday night. Lovely.

Lovely. And another person in the same community also professed faith with her. And isn't it lovely? You don't get used to that.

You mustn't get used to that. This is something we long for in our own children, and we long for in our own families, and we long for with our work colleagues, and we long for with our communities. We look for God to restore things, to turn things back, because only the Lord can do that. And when he does it, there's this personal result.

So if I were to ask you, why are you not like those who dream? Why are you not filled with laughter? why are your tongue not filled with shouts of joy?

[25 : 14] If you're honest, you would answer either one of two things. The Lord has done nothing in my life. He's done nothing in the lives of my family members, or in my community, or in my world, or I've lost sight of what the Lord has done.

And there's something calculated about the way our world is structured. And I know Satan, he's the prince of the power of the air, and he always will be.

And he will be determined to keep you from thinking about what the Lord has already done. absolutely determined. He'll use your device, your iPhone, your iPad, your TV, he'll use all sorts of things, anything, just to keep you from thinking.

I was sharing with somebody earlier this morning, as I was saying to this person, do you think about such and such a thing? He said, not sure I can think about that because that would be too difficult. We have to think. We must think. See, this psalmist could never have written this without thought. This personal result.

[26 : 43] You don't want laughter and joy manufactured. That's, you know what that's like. That's hollow. That's rubbish.

That's worth nothing to men or to God, really. But when you have laughter and you're dreaming and you say, this is like a dream, and there's joy, and it's because of what God has done, great.

That's why he said the Sabbath is a good day. Why? Because you have time to think. Just time to think. What has the Lord done for me?

If you had to write a psalm, it's called a hymn, Psalm 105, written by a group who were thinking about what the Lord has done. If you had to write and pen a narrative of what the Lord has done in your life, you know, it would do you the world of good.

You may even come across things that he hasn't done that. He hasn't done that. that might be the changing point in your life when you realize he hasn't done that.

[28 : 04] But that leads to the third thing, the public impact. See, when the Lord intervenes and restores the fortunes of his work in a community or an individual, there's this personal impact.

They're like those who dream. they're filled with laughter, they're shouts with joy, and people notice. There's public impact. This is, isn't this the case that there are times in the history of the church and times in the history of God's people when they are the talk of the town, they are the talk of the village, they are the talk of the family.

It's a time when people take notice of that person and say, now that's changed. That's a change. She never used to be like that. Or that family there, that family there never used to be like that, coming to church, reading the word, sending their children to Sunday school or youth camp, giving good things.

They never used to be like that. It's as if God himself has noticed because the people in the community, they don't just see what the Lord has done in this person's life, they know it's the Lord that did it.

[29 : 43] You notice what it says in the psalm there, the Lord has done great things for them. That's what's being said among the nations. It's not just that there's a change happened. The Lord did it.

How do they know it's the Lord that did it? Probably two things. One is the change is so great it could never possibly be man that did it.

Two, the people who have been changed and restored are always speaking about the Lord. See, if the Lord has done a work in you, you are changed.

And the name that you name is the name of the Lord. Isn't it that a wonderful way in which that's presented in the Bible? Those who name the name of the Lord should turn from iniquity.

Naming the name of the Lord. When you're a Christian, you don't keep silent. You don't keep it a secret.

[30 : 45] It's something you share with others. You name the name of the Lord. Why? Because he restored you. He intervened to rescue you in and through his Son by his Holy Spirit and he's done it for you.

And you're noticed. And your God is noticed. How does Jesus put it in Matthew chapter 5? Let your light shine before men.

Why? So that they might see the good works that you are doing. Because you never used to do them before. And then what?

Glorify your Father who is in heaven. So you're doing good works and they become aware by your speech as well as by your actions.

I'm doing these because I'm a child of my Father in heaven. Heaven has come to earth in my life.

[31 : 53] It's a wonderful thing. And in that situation people say I want to glorify your Father who is in heaven. I want to speak about his glory.

He's made an impression on you and I want him to leave his weighty impression his glory upon us as well. And that's what's happening here.

They're saying among the nations the Lord has done great things for them. It's beautiful. Is it possible in the 21st century in West Lothian that God could bring the community to stop and take notice of God himself God's wisdom God's provision God's power God's compassion God's love God's mercy because it's at work in your life and in mine.

Public impact that would thrill you. It would thrill God God's love and it will utterly displease Satan. He doesn't want you to name the name of the Lord. He doesn't want God to be noticed. But this is the way for the public impact to come.

[33 : 27] The Lord restores the fortunes the impact upon the people themselves like those who dream laughter joy and then the nations take note.

We have to speak about God. The nations then take note not only of our speech but the change of life because of God.

Now please notice this. You've got to speak about God. Dare I say to myself and to you we have to speak about God more not less.

The way to win people is not to speak about God less. So that we just build contact with them over the years and then drop in a hint about the gospel in the most vague in offensive way possible.

No, no, I'm not asking you to go out and tell them that they're sinners. I'm asking you to tell them that God saved you, rescued you, restored you, and made your life so different, your future so different.

[34 : 43] that's what you want to do. And tell them, speak of God, speak of God.

the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ will be all the stronger in Scotland if Christians name the name of the Lord more in their speech.

And finally here, believe in confession. See, once the nations say, wow, what a change, the Lord has done great things for them.

See, the them and us. He hasn't done it for us, but he's done it for them. That might make them think, them and us. See, part of the problem with the church today, it wants to be part of society in such a way that society is not threatened or felt different to the church at all.

Sometimes the church says, we've got to be like them. Do you remember the arguments of the General Assembly in the Church of Scotland? when they were saying God is doing a new work among us.

[35 : 57] God's spirit is doing new things. We've got to be part of the world in which we live. We've got to take on board their norms so that we are able to help them.

You listen to this and you say, that's the wrong way round. God's done a work in his people. the Lord has done great things for them.

Then the nation takes note of them and says, the Lord has done great things for them. Them and us. They are them and us, of course, that's bad.

You never want to be aloof from society. You never want to be the odd bod in your Christian street.

You never want to be somebody that's deliberately offensive you don't want that at all.

You don't want that. Nor, however, do you want to lose the distinction between them and us.

[37 : 05] Why? Because that will lead you to reach out to the gospel to them. They might not always thank you, but one day some of them will.

Some of them will. But then it's when it comes back and you say, you know what? See what the world is saying about us.

The Lord has done great things for them. It's as if you say, you know what? The Lord did do great things for us. We are glad. Isn't it great when the world is the one that the Lord uses to remind us of what the Lord did.

We do wonderful things because we have been changed and restored by the Lord. The world takes note and we take note of what the world says, the nations say, actually, yeah, the Lord has done great things for us so that we overflow with thankfulness.

We thank God for his indescribable gift. I think it's great. When I was at Mrs.

[38 : 30] Golland's funeral along with Liz the other day, it was lovely to see so many people there from a range of denominations, churches, and some of them not Christians in the community as well, but they were all there because in many ways that's exactly what they were saying.

The Lord did great things for her. and there we are at a funeral saying, do you know what? The Lord has done great things for us.

We are glad. See when you're at a funeral of a loved one who died in Christ, it's precious. It is so precious.

the Lord has done great things for us. Every funeral service, and I hope my own funeral service will have that tone in it.

The Lord has done great things for us. There have been times when I thought, I don't want eulogies, and I'm not a great fan of eulogies at all.

[39 : 47] But I do, I do want that tone to be there. The Lord has done great things. It's the Lord. It is the Lord.

Historical fact, personal result, public impact, believing confession. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we entrust ourselves to you.

Work Lord, and remind us of the things that you have done. How can it possibly be that we could forget you?

Is that why you told us to do this in remembrance of me when we have the Lord's supper as we did last week? To our shame, Lord, we do need that reminder.

Is that why you gave us the Sabbath day so that we could look out and remember what you did in creation and in redemption? creation. Yes, we confess, Lord, that we have all too often forgotten what you have done and forgotten to give thanks to you and forgotten to give thanks for what you have done in the lives of others.

[41 : 07] Lord, open our eyes, then open our lips, give us laughter, give us joy, give us praise, and we pray, Lord, that you would open the hearts and minds of the nations, those who are looking on, because we are a city in the world set on a hill, not meant to be hidden, but to be seen.

Use us, Lord, we pray for your glory in Christ Jesus. Amen. Amen. Let's