

Rain and Refreshing

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to look at this psalm, psalm number 68, and reading at verse 9, psalm 68, reading at verse 9.

We'll read from verse 7, but it's from verse 9, I want us to look at. O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain before God, the one of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel.

In this verse, rain in abundance, O God, you shed abroad, you restored your inheritance as it languished. Now, this is quite a tremendous song.

In fact, it's a marching song. If we were to read it as it was written in the Hebrew language, it catches there something of the marching of like an army.

It's a triumphant song, and of course, it's one that David, we see there. It's a psalm of David. And David is here talking about the omnipotent God, the God of all power, the God of majesty, the God of strength, and the God who continues to show himself strong on behalf of his people.

[1 : 34] And it's highlighting there how God met or enabled his people to march through the great wilderness and provided rain for them, sending plenty rain.

And of course, in the Middle East, there were often times where there'd be great drought, and it wouldn't take long until the earth would become bone dry and plants would wither and languish and hang down.

But it's amazing when just the rain starts, how quickly things revive, things that you might even think, oh, that's gone, that's dead. There's no life left there.

But the rain comes, and all of a sudden, it begins to spring up again and show life and sprout and so on. And to a certain extent, it is a picture of the church.

And I believe that we, in the New Testament dispensation, are able to take these truths that are given to us in the Old Testament, where we have these pictures given of how God dealt with his people then, of how he sent forth rain in abundance, and of how he restored his inheritance as it languished, and to see this in a New Testament context and to see it applied to ourselves.

[2 : 54] And the psalm here speaks of your inheritance, and of course, that is the church, because the church is the inheritance. It's the inheritance.

It's Jesus' inheritance. God gave the church to Jesus Christ, but of course, he had to also purchase it.

He had to purchase the church. He had to purchase with his own blood. But of course, he possesses the church. And Christ, as we know, loved the church and gave himself for it.

Now, when we think of the church, we so often, we can think of it in various ways. We sometimes think of our own church here. And people say, we're going to the church, and we talk about the free church here.

But when we, again, sometimes when people talk about the church, people might talk about the church in the island, they mean all the different denominations within the church, all the different denominations within the island.

[3 : 57] And again, sometimes when we talk about the church, at large, we talk about the church throughout our nation or throughout the world. And we've always got to remember that the church ultimately belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

But of course, the results are spoken. We differentiate, or there's different terms used, where what is known as the visible church and the invisible church.

The visible church, if we were to use our own particular congregation here, would be everybody who belongs to the church, from the very youngest to the oldest.

Whether they've accepted Jesus Christ as Savior or not, they still belong to the visible church. That is the church that you can see.

They belong to it. They may only come to it now and again, but they still belong to it. They would class themselves as belonging to this church. And they want to belong to the church.

[5 : 05] For them, it is important to have an adherence to the church. And of course, there's many levels towards, with regard to people who adhere to the church.

And so, that is what we term the visible church. But there is also the invisible church, which is known only to God.

That is, that every single person who is saved, every person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is a church that Jesus Christ gave his life for.

Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. That is, that is for every single person who loves him. Every person that he first loved.

And that number, which is a number that nobody can count, is known only to the Lord. And we can even say that there are people in the invisible church who aren't in a visible church.

[6 : 09] We might think of people in some of the persecuted countries in this world. There might be an isolated believer there. Who hasn't, there is, he or she has no fellowship with anybody.

Nobody knows that they exist as a believer apart from the Lord alone. And we believe there are such throughout the world who may have been converted through listening to something that they heard on a message, on a, maybe an internet message.

Maybe they're in a country where all this is banned and yet they were able to hear it and came to faith. And they are in total isolation. They don't know of any other Christian. They are the only one.

They are the only one that knows. But this is all part of the Lord's great church. And we've got to remember that the church, as it says here, is his inheritance.

And as such, this is what belongs to him. The church is his special portion in this world. The church alone is his portion in this world.

[7 : 21] Now, of course, the earth belongs to the Lord. The psalm tells us that. The earth belongs to the Lord and all that it contains. We've got to remember that. But there is at one level a truth in the fact that there is only the church that is being saved in this world.

Because everything else in this world is ripe for destruction. There is going to come a time when every person that has turned their back upon Jesus Christ is banished from the presence of God.

That's what will happen at the end. The Lord will say to everyone that has turned their back upon him, Depart from me. I never knew you. This very world, as we know it, is going to burn up.

It's going to melt with fervent heat. Again, that's going to happen. So the only thing that is to be taken out of this world and to be brought into the immediate presence of the Lord is his inheritance, his church.

And it's very interesting that if you were to ask the world tonight, How do you rate, if you were to do a sort of a chart, a top 10 or top 20 of what they would look on, as the world would look on, as the important institutions of this world, the things that really matter, where would the church be?

[8 : 52] Well, it wouldn't be at number one, as far as the world is concerned, or two, or three, or four, or five. It would be way down, as far as the world is concerned. But not as far as God is concerned.

The church is his, and he is going to save us from this world. And we've always got to remember that. In fact, it was even mentioned in the prayer tonight, of how it's so easy for us to be caught up in this world, to become attached to this world.

And I think all of us know how easy that is. But we've also got to remember that the Lord is saving us from, this is what he says, you are being saved from this present evil world.

You're being saved from it. Yes, we live in it. We interact, we work, and such like. But it's not, it is most certainly not our place. We're being saved from it.

Because it is evil, and it is ripe for destruction. It's groaning. It's under the curse. And sometimes we forget that. And the Lord will always bring something in to remind us that this world is not our home.

[10 : 01] We're just passing through. We're being saved from it. Now, of course, the condition of the church can change. At one level, we could say that the church never changes.

It certainly never changes with regard to its foundation. Because its foundation is the Lord Jesus Christ. But the church changes with regard to condition.

Because at different times, we find, for instance, that there were times when the church, as in Egypt, was in slavery.

There were times when the church was in weariness, marching through the wilderness. There were times the church was in conflict, as in the times of Joshua, as they were conquering the land.

There were times that the church knew great peace and prosperity, as in the times of the reign of Solomon. There were times when the church knew what it was to be in absolute captivity and in exile, as we read about when the Jews were taken captive.

[11 : 07] And so it is that there are different periods in the history of the church. There are times sometimes of great refreshing. There are times sometimes of great decline.

There are times sometimes that the church is experiencing persecution. Other times, the church and the world, there's like a temporary truce.

And that it's a time where it's easier to live as a Christian. But the fact is that the believer will always experience something of the weariness that is spoken of here.

Of that sense of languishing. And you know, you can have a, I would say, you could have people who, supposing you were in a church and there was a ministry that was completely dead that the minister was somebody who didn't know the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you could have a congregation that there would be many who were formal or nominal Christians who didn't themselves know the Lord Jesus Christ. And they would be quite content in it.

[12 : 22] But if there were true believers there, they would find themselves languishing. They would be weary. They'd be stifled. They'd be hungering. They'd be thirsting.

And that is how it is as we journey through this world. We find ourselves so often that there's this hungering and there's this thirsting.

There's a weariness. And sometimes the older you get and the longer you go on, the wearier you become of it. And that is an evidence of life. Because only somebody who has life in them actually can be weary.

And that is how it is so often with the Christian. So we have to ask ourselves, what is it that causes then that sometimes that the Lord's people are languishing, that they're weary as they journey through?

Well, there are various things that we could suggest. We could often think of our lack of progress. Because we're wanting to...

[13 : 27] Obviously, we look at it personally and we look at it congregationally. We look at the church at large, denominational, and so on. But there are times, sometimes we really become weary.

Because sometimes you say to yourself, well, you know, we put a lot of effort in. You put so much in. And, you know, it's a very tiring thing if you put a lot in and there doesn't seem to be much happening.

And sometimes that's how it is. That there's this... Because when things... You know, you and I know that when things are going well, there's a kind of...

An energy is built up through it. It's sort of this energy. When there's a vitality, it energizes you. And there's enthusiasm. And things are going well. But sometimes we find that we're making little progress.

And when that happens, we can become weary. And again, when there's little growth, because the church has been planted in order to grow. You and I have been planted in order to grow and to bring forth fruit to the glory of God.

[14 : 35] And when that isn't happening, when people aren't being converted, when people aren't growing as Christians, when everything is flat and static and stale, then a weariness comes in.

And the church also becomes weary when it would appear that the Lord isn't working. That there is a...

You feel that maybe His Spirit isn't at work. Because you might find that prayer is hard. And you might find that the preaching, you're not getting anything from the preaching.

And you might find that it's not just in the public means of grace, but even in the private, in your own time. When you try and read, when it's personal, it's not just in the public means, but this affects even into the private means.

You find that there's this... There's this struggling, that there's this... Almost like an effort into it. And again, maybe it's an evidence where people become more concerned with the externals rather than

with the spirituality.

[15 : 43] People are more concerned with the outward things rather than with the spiritual. But the great thing is this. The church has gone through its periods of weariness over and over and over and over again.

But here what we're told is, Reign in abundance, O God, you shed abroad. You restored your inheritance as it languished. There it was, weary, withering, tired, dumb. But the Lord sends down his showers and it all changes. It revives. And that's what the Lord will do. And he will hear the cry of the languishing.

And you know, it's very... The worst thing that we can ever do if we feel tired and weary is to give up. Giving Christians who give up it's not a good thing.

Because we've got to remember that it's a church... This is where revival starts. It's within the church. And this is what we've got to pray for is that the Lord will come with reviving power.

[16 : 56] That he will send down showers of blessing. And you know, everything can change in a moment. Maybe some old Christians will say, Well, I remember other days. I remember days where churches were full and people were hungering for the word.

And it's so different now. Of course it is. It's a different day. A very different day. But what the Lord was in the past, he can again be in the present. He hasn't changed.

And as we said, the times change. What may happen today, it could be completely different tomorrow. And as we said, there were times when the church was in slavery.

Times the church was in weariness. Times the church was in conflict. Times the church had the prosperity and peace. Times the church was in exile. That's the Old Testament church.

All these different times. But the great thing is that God never changes. When David went out to fight Goliath, one of the things that propelled him forward was the unchanging God.

[18 : 01] The God who had delivered him out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear. He said, you know, this God, you, Lord, you delivered me from the lion, you delivered me from the bear, you will deliver me from this big giant.

And the Lord did. He had great faith. And he believed what the Lord had done in the past, the Lord would do again. And that's what you and I must have within our own heart.

Because we must cry to the Lord and we must come confessing our sin. And when we come confessing our sin and repenting, we do it first and foremost for ourselves.

And then we do it for our congregation. And then we do it for our denomination. And then we do it for the church at large. And then we do it for our nation.

because if you and I don't, nobody else will. Because the Lord says it's my people who are called by my name.

[19 : 02] If they will repent and if they will cry, that he will hear their cry and he will come and he will heal the land. We see tonight there's huge tensions with regard to our future, with regard to Brexit.

And there are huge concerns and rightly so. What is going to happen to the nation? What way are we going to go? But you know it's so important that we turn to the Lord and we cry to him and above all we go and say Lord forgive us.

Forgive us as a nation. And as we've often said it like Daniel, we have sinned. Daniel didn't say they've sinned, they've done all this. We have, we all have.

And it's important that we plead before the Lord that he will have mercy upon us and that he will come with showers of refreshing and that he'll bring back vitality and energy and that it will affect whole communities.

That's what happened in the past. That even people, it's amazing, people who didn't actually come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, even those people were often influenced. People who used to glory in their sin became ashamed of their sin.

[20 : 26] And that's what the Lord says that he does. That he sends down the rain and he restores and he brings again to his inheritance life and vitality.

Let us pray that the Lord will do that for us. Let us pray. O Lord our God, we again give you thanks for your goodness to us.

We give thanks, Lord, that what you have been in the past, you continue to be in the present and will be also in the future. We pray to bless each one of us, bless us with health and with strength.

We pray that you will take us to our home safely and you will do us good. We pray to give wisdom to our leaders and those in authority over us at this time, particularly with regard to the whole debate with regard to Brexit.

O Lord, do what is good for us spiritually, morally as a nation. We ask, Lord, that you will give wisdom, divine wisdom to our leaders.

[21 : 28] Lord, we commit to you those who are sick and suffering. We know that there are so many, but again, we bring Norman and Christine's son, Calmean, to your mind and ask that you will heal him.

He's now been 13 weeks ill and we pray, O Lord, that you will restore him to full health and strength. There are so many, we remember Christina Hedy, who professed faith at her communion recently and has become so ill, has not been able to come back to church and it's her one desire, if even I could get back once again and we remember all who are ill like that at this time.

Remember as we heard Lizzie, we pray Lord to restore her to full health and strength and that she will not have any recurring nightmares even over this awful accident that happened to her.

We pray Lord for all who are unwell. There are so many who are in hospital, those who are ill and seriously ill. We commit them to your care and ask for your healing gracious hand to be upon them.

Do us all good, we pray and we sin in Jesus' name. Amen. We can include singing in this psalm, the 68th psalm, psalm number 68, from verse 8 to verse 11.

[22 : 56] Sorry, it's in the Scottish Psalter, psalm 68, verses 8 to 11. Psalm 68, verses 8 to 11.

Then at God's presence shook the earth, then groves from heaven fell, this sign I should be for the Lord, the God of Israel.

O God, the to thy heritage, descend the plenteous rain, whereby the wind in witty walls didst repress again.

Thy congregation make their habitation there, of thine own goodness for the poor, O God, thou didst prepare, the Lord himself did give the word, the word abroad did spread, great was the company of them, as him who published it.

Now may the grace, mercy, and peace of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forever more. Amen.