Singing for Revival

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Preacher: John Winter

[0:00] Well, we're reading together from Psalm 85, which is a return to our series on the soul song. The psalm today is entitled Singing for Revival.

I'll explain what I mean by revival in just a moment. But we're going to read together Psalm 85. It'll come up on the screen, hopefully. It'll be big enough for you to see. So, here we are.
You can feel free, please, to read along if you can see that. Because it is a communal song, so shall we do that together? You showed favor to your land, O Lord.
You restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins.
You set aside all your wrath and turn from your fierce anger. Restore us again, O God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us.
[1:09] Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations?
Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

Show us your unfailing love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation. I will listen to what God the Lord will say.
He promises peace to his people, his saints, but let them not return to folly. Surely his salvation is near those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.
Amen.
Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word. It's quite something, isn't it, to read out loud, to read the scripture as people in David's day and in the sons of Korah's day would have experienced it through a public hearing and a public reading.
[2:40] So Psalm 85 is a song or a lament from a longing heart who wants reformation, restoration, and revival. It's a good way of remembering it, isn't it, the theme of the sermon.

Reformation, restoration, and revival. Now this psalm is the psalm of the sons of Korah. As I've said, we've got a number of their psalms. Psalm 42, Psalm 49, sorry, Psalm 44 through the 49, and then Psalms 84, 85, 87, and 88.
So they sing a lot of these psalms. We know nothing really very much about the historical setting. It looks like there's reference to the Exodus because it talks about deliverance and so on.
So historically taking them back to their memory of what was the defining moment for the nation, the deliverance from slavery in Egypt to the promised land.
But it could be any exilic situation. So it could be the Assyrian exile or even the Babylonian exile. We've got reference to that in the psalms. By the rivers of Babylon, as we sat down, there we wept, as we remembered Zion.
[3:53] And then the psalmist speaks about how the Lord gave them a song to sing on their deliverance. So we don't know the historical situation, but it doesn't matter in a way.

What matters is that when we are in difficulty, when we are going through times of barrenness and spiritual dryness, then we are compelled by this psalm to cry out to God for reformation, restoration, and revival.
Will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you? There's a recognition there that I need God to work in me to give me the joy that I once knew, that somehow I have lost, perhaps because of sin or a lack of repentance, or perhaps because I've just become careless and complacent in my Christian life.
And so if that's how you feel at the moment, if that's where you are, then this is a good psalm to be in. Because whatever the historical setting, it's speaking now into our history and into our life and encouraging us to consider where we are in our relationship with Jesus and to begin again.

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And that's the wonderful thing about living this life of grace, experiencing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It really doesn't matter how bad things have been.
[5:30] You can always begin again. There's always a new day with God. Always the possibility of new beginnings. And we should never forget that.

It's a wonderful thing about His grace. Revival always begins in the house of God. 1 Peter 4, verse 17 says, It is time for judgment to begin with the family of God.
And if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? So there's a warning there from Peter. But nonetheless, a reminder to us that it begins with us.
And historically, if you have ever studied the history of revivals, then you will discover that actually it always begins with repentance. Repentance on the part of the people of God who acknowledge before God that they have lost their first love.
That's what Jesus said, didn't He, to the Ephesian church in Revelation. You know, I have so much that I can commend you for, He says. Your hard work, your faithfulness, your obedience to the Scriptures, etc.
[6:40] God, all of this I can commend for you, but I have this against you. This one thing. You've forgotten. You've lost your first love.

That must be heartbreaking to hear, isn't it? Because we're tender to the Lord and we want to honor Him and obey Him, but we want to love Him primarily.
It's never enough to just go through the motions, is it? Our hearts will not allow us to do that so easily. We can pull the wool over people's eyes, we can kid people, etc., etc., but we can't pull the wool over Jesus's eyes.
He knows exactly where we are and who we are. Did you ever think of poor Peter there after the resurrection? And there he's sculpted off to do a bit of fishing. Perhaps a statement there that he's not expecting to come back or to be of any use to Jesus.
And then Jesus specifically says, disciples, I'm going to meet you by Galilee. I want you to go there. I want you to bring Peter. Imagine how Peter felt about that.
[7:49] It's like going into the headmaster's office when you know you've been naughty and expecting a punishment. And then Jesus speaks to him, Peter, he doesn't say, Peter, do you obey me?

He doesn't say, Peter, do you know the Scriptures well? Well, Peter, have you given of your tithes and offerings? He says, Peter, do you love me? Because that's what he really wants from us.
More than anything else, he wants our love. If we have left our first love, this is a psalm for us. Lord, revive in me, restore in me, a love for Jesus that I have lost because to my shame, I have become too caught up in the processes of following you that I have forgotten that what matters most is relationship.
That matters more. I can read my Bible every day. I can pray every day. But if my heart is not in it, it's just a religious activity. It's not real. Ruben Torrey.
Next slide, please. Ruben Torrey. was asked once. He was a great evangelist. He preached with D.L. Moody, less well-known than Moody, but a very faithful gospel man and eventually the principal of the Moody Institute.
[9:10] He was asked, how would revival begin? How would we experience revival? And this is what he says. Get a piece of chalk and draw a circle on the floor with that piece of chalk and then step inside the circle and say, Lord, start a revival inside this circle.

You know, you've lived the Christian life a long time. You've been around Christians a long time as we all have. And there's any number of people who will tell us what is wrong with the church. And they will tell us what is wrong with our church and what is wrong with the minister of the church. What is wrong with this minister? And it's undoubtedly all true and there's more if they knew the half. But the question is not what is wrong with the church.
The question's got to be, it's got to start with, what is wrong with me? What do I need to put right first? As G.K. Chesterton famously said when he was asked the question, what is wrong with the world?
He replied, I am. I am. We want to put the world right. Or as one has put it quite recently, to a secular audience, to young people, if you want to change the world, start by tidying your room.
[10:24] Yeah, we can get involved with all the big stuff, but fail to kind of critically evaluate where we are. And in the Christian life, we need to do that.

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This is September. For me, the church year always starts in September. It's like the school year. It's where you mean to begin again after the upset and relaxation of the summer.
So as we begin this September, in this life of the church, are we prepared to put ourselves in the circle and say, start a revival, Lord, in me?
Charles Finney, a little bit before Moody and Torrey said, revival starts with repentance on the part of God's people. If we will start obeying God, the Holy Spirit will begin to work in power in our lives. And as a result, in the lives of those who as yet have not believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. We want to save the world. We want to reach out and save the lost.
[11:29] But again, it begins with us. For those who go out to the lost, go out with tears, weeping, carrying their sheaves, and then come home rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

We will only really reach out to save the lost if we fear for the lost. And what will happen to them if they die without repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.
So this psalm is for those who have become dry, who need reformation, restoration, and revival. I can't judge anybody's heart, only my own.
But Lord, send a revival and start the work in me. James Montgomery Boyce in his comrade says, Have you ever been discouraged because the life you are living now does not seem to be as real or as joyful as your life was after you first became a Christian?
John Wesley knew times like this and wrote about them poetically, asking, Where is the joy I knew where first I saw the Lord? It is a good question. In such times, we long for the spiritual vitality and fruitfulness of earlier days.
[12:41] And if we are not too discouraged to pray about it, our prayer is often that God might revive us or restore us to what we once knew. Psalm 85 is precisely this kind of prayer.

Send a revival, Lord. Start the work in me. But perhaps you're saying, Well, I really don't need a revival because I'm fine. Thank you very much. Okay, well, let Nathaniel Olson ask you a number of questions.
When do we need a revival, he asks. And he answered, When it is easier to stay at home than go to church. Well, that doesn't apply to any of you here. But it applies to many.
When it is easier to work than to worship. When it is easier to be critical than kind. When it is easier to read fiction than the Bible. When it is easier to share God-given opportunities than to do it.
When it is easier to support the club, might be a football club, than the church. I love football, so that's very much the home. When it is easier to sleep in church than to stay awake.
[13:56] Some of you might have medical reasons for that, I understand, so don't worry too much.
When it is easier to grumble than to praise. When it is easier to condemn souls than to pray for their salvation.

When it is easier to hold grudges than to forgive. When it is easier to be worldly than to be holy.
When it is easier to withhold our tithes and offerings and spend them on trinkets of time instead of investing them in the diamonds of eternity.
The language is old, but the challenge is real. None of us can be complacent in the light of such a challenge. Revival is when a people are saturated with God.
That's a title, a subtitle of Brian Edwards' book. It was actually a language of Duncan Campbell. If you've never read about Duncan Campbell, you should read about him.
He was preaching on the Isle of Lewis. He was invited to preach in the Isle of Lewis. And the Isle of Lewis, for all its church attendance, was beginning to experience great spiritual drought and dryness, and especially among young people who were no longer attending the gatherings of Christ's church.
[15:10] And so there was a desire for people to begin to pray for God to turn the hearts of the people back to Christ again.

And Lewis tells this, sorry, Campbell tells the story of what that was like. He said that it all began in a barn in a place called Barbas in Lewis.
He said, I say God came down and Lewis was shaken. God stepped down, he said.
The Holy Spirit began to move among the people and the minister writing about what happened on the following morning said this, you met God on meadow and moorland.
you met him in the homes of the people. God seemed to be everywhere. I know this, that from the village and Hamlet the people came. Were you to ask some of them today what was it that moved you?

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[16:14] They couldn't tell you, only that they were moved by a power that they could not explain. And the power was such as to give them to understand and see that they were hell-deserving sinners.

Now that is the fact that cannot be disputed. God was everywhere and because of this awareness of God the churches were crowded through the day right on through the night until five and six o'clock in the morning in revival time does not exist.
The presence of God was there. Now, Duncan Campbell will tell you the minister who was ministering in that community and visiting two old ladies and when he went to visit these two old ladies the two old ladies said to him we need to have a time of prayer for revival you need to be praying constantly for revival he wasn't best pleased by them because they were suggesting that things weren't as they should be but eventually he agreed to do this and then every Friday afternoon he prayed with these two ladies Duncan Campbell tells when he was invited to go and preach in one of the parishes but the elders in that particular parish were against him they thought he was a fanatic and so he decided he wasn't going to go but these two dear old ladies say well if you don't go you will be disobedient to God and so he went and when he went there was such a movement of God's spirit that it just amazed them all even to the point that there was a report there were two to three hundred people praying outside of the police station now that's revival you see God comes down and God can do in a day what we cannot do in years all the activity of this church it's wonderful it's great but it's nothing compared to what God can do there is much more that God can do we see our scaffolds and we see our empty seats we see what God has done in renovating and restoration restoration of this place and you the people are being revived and renovated and restored and that's what's more important and that's what we should long for and never be content with what we currently experience knowing that Jesus can do so much more immeasurably more than anything we ask or imagine revival revival begins with a vision and the vision begins with a new sense of Jesus Christ revival does not begin in theology it begins in what we call theophany an encounter with God an encounter with Jesus it begins with the revelation of Jesus to the soul of the individual who longs for a restoration of that first love
Lord send a revival begin the work in me I mentioned D.L. Moody D.L.
[19:28] Moody was a great American evangelist I say great he actually wasn't a very good preacher at all he wasn't very well educated he hadn't a college degree he was a bit of a you know a wide boy in many respects from the city of Chicago but in every respect a little bit awkward for the ministry things were not going well as a minister in the summer of 1871 things got worse because his congregational church this was congregational his congregational church burned down in the great fire of Chicago but in 1871 of the summer of 1871 he was praying and while he was praying he prayed that the Lord would move in his heart among the people and make a great difference to the city there was the great fire the building was destroyed and then he went to New

York and when he was in New York he was praying for God to restore his ministry restore his congregation restore the building just empower him in a new way and then he says this suddenly one day in the city of New York oh what a day I cannot describe it I seldom refer to it it is almost too sacred an experience to name I can only say that God revealed himself to me and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay his hand I went to preaching again the sermons were not different I did not present any new truths and yet hundreds were converted and I would not now be placed back where I was before that blessed experience if you should give me all the world it would be small dust in the balance and John Piper speaking of Moody reminds us that he was without higher education but he founded three schools without theological training he reshaped Victorian Christianity without radio or television he reached 100 million people that's what God can do for hearts that are set ablaze again with love for Jesus so what do we need to do I'm going to do this very quickly we need next slide we need to remember past mercies the psalmist begins by remembering what God has done and he could talk couldn't he about Israel he could talk about the promised land he could talk about how wonderful it is to view he could talk about the way it was transformed economically and socially but what he talks about if you notice carefully is he talks about how the people's sin were forgiven because that's the greatest gift of all isn't it that God should restore people by taking their brokenness and fixing them in the blood of Jesus
Christ blessed are he is he whose sin is forgiven whose transgression is forgiven rather whose sin is covered blessed is the one to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity the greatest and most wonderful thing that ever happens to us is to come to know Jesus as our Savior and Lord to know

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that he will forgive us on account of what he has done for us on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and if we lose sight of that or we don't feel it's worth we inevitably will lose our first love for if we do not live everyday grateful for the fact that we are forgiven how will we ever be grateful or desire heaven if God bores us now how are we going to last for eternity yeah if we don't want to spend time with now well quite frankly we're not ready for heaven we'll be bored but let us remember that Jesus has paid a great price for us and let us be ever thankful for his past mercies what have I got to thank God for the fact that Jesus died for me the fact that the son of God loved me and gave himself for me the fact that I'm now accepted by God into his family the fact that all my sins have been washed away the fact that I have received the deposit and inheritance of the Holy Spirit so that God lives in me the fact that I have already been given a guarantee of eternal life in Jesus that's what I've got to be thankful for all God's past mercies let us never forget his past mercies and next we also need to pray for a restorative revival and we pray for this in various ways next slide God please restore that's the first thing God please restore to restore means to revive again to turn us back to turn our hearts back to
[25:00] God to turn us from our iniquities and our sinfulness from the fact that we have displeased God the next thing we pray is God please revive!

and to revive means God put new life into us and there's this wonderful Old Testament picture in the prophet Ezekiel when he sees a valley of dry bones and he asks the prophet can these bones live and Ezekiel says well Lord you know seems impossible they're all dead they're bleached dry and then he sees as the wind blows the spirit comes and a great army arises again God can bring life where there is death and God can change a situation that looks hopeless and helpless and make it powerful and effective for the changing of society and if God has done that in the past he can do it in the present God please revive why can he not do it the prophet Joel famously asked this question of the people of Israel why can God not change things and he gave them an example of locusts locusts coming into the land swarming across the land swarming all over the crops and devouring them and then he says to Joel and Joel by extension to the people
I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten and I love that imagery what the world has destroyed for you I will restore and when you thought everything was hopeless and gone I will revive and that's the thing we see God doing again and again isn't it God takes broken damaged lives and he not only restores them he revives them he not only comforts and consoles but he transforms lives and you know what that's like if you experienced it and don't you thank God for it that he has taken your life broken as it was and he has turned it round because Christ died for you and because you have been wonderfully transformed and blessed by his Holy
Spirit and brought into the family of God he has repaid the years the locusts have eaten Lord you did that for me in the past please do it again as my longing heart waits for you and then we say God please show us your unfailing love we get excited about Jesus and we know the difference he makes but so many people don't love him so many people don't experience him as we have and so we pray God convince them because I can't but God can show us your unfailing love let us experience the warmth and the blessing of your love in our lives and then God please let your glory dwell in our land our politicians bless them do their best many of us may think they're doing a good job others of us might think they're doing a lousy job and the previous ones before them and the previous ones before them and so on and so forth but our politicians cannot do what our nation desperately needs to happen it cannot produce godliness it cannot produce righteousness it cannot produce a society in which people are loved and respected just for who they are not for what they do not for their celebrity status not for their notoriety it doesn't dismiss we don't live in a society that just dismisses some people because they're considered unimportant or they have lives that are considered not worth living we need a return to god as a nation and we need to have people in power who honor and respect god we will never have a christian nation we do not live in a theocracy and god never intended that we should but we do need a nation and a parliament that respects the laws of god respects god's word and will seek to implement some of that in their laws and their practices that used to be this nation do you know the motto the old motto of glasgow well you might know it now glasgow smiles better that wasn't its motto its motto was glasgow smiles better under the preaching of god's word that's what it was and this nation will smile better under the preaching of god's word dr lloyd jones once said who cannot but grieve to see zion the church powerless and poverty stricken and so unworthy of her great lord and master what can be more pitiful than to see the body of christ reduced to no more than a number of committees and

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conferences without the spirit and without power or to see christians on their knees in repentance and earnest prayer that god should visit us again by his grace what a difference it would make if he did if mercy and truth kissed each other and righteousness and peace were experienced and felt in our land lord send a revival begin the work in me and the last slide please how much does god want to revive and restore us how much does he want us no no got the one before to experience the grace and the
loveliness and the love of our lord jesus christ well i love this verse in isaiah 30 verse 18 yet the lord longs to be gracious to you he rises to show you compassion for the lord is a god of justice blessed are all who wait on him just take that in for a moment the lord longs to be gracious to you there is no longing or desire that you have in your heart for jesus that he does not want for you more than you want it he wants to give you so much he's the father who is waiting for his prodigal to return he's ready to welcome you home put his arms around you and give you a party he is able to do immeasurably more than anything you ask or imagine so the question is not how much does he want to give you the question is how much are you prepared to give him lord will you not revive me again that my heart may rejoice in you draw the circle put yourself in it amen

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