

8/13/23 - Psalm 80 - "All For What?"

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[0 : 00] Psalm 80. To the choir master, according to lilies, a testimony of Asaph, a psalm.

Give ear, O shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up your might and come to save us.

Restore us, O God. Let your face shine that we may be saved. O Lord, God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink in full measure. You make us an object of contention for our neighbors and our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts. Let your face shine that we may be saved. You brought a vine out of Egypt and you drove out the nations and planted it.

[1 : 15] You cleared the ground for it. It took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade and the mighty cedars with its branches. It set out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the river.

Why then have you broken down its walls so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? The boar from the forest ravages it and all that move in the field feed on it.

Turn again, O God of hosts. Look down from heaven and see. Have regard for this vine, the stalk that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself.

They have burned it with fire. They have cut it down. May they perish at the rebuke of your face. Let your hand beyond the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself.

Then we shall not turn back from you. Give us life and we will call upon your name. Restore us, O Lord, God of hosts. Let your face shine that we may be saved.

[2 : 29] This is the word of the Lord. Amen. It's interesting how choruses normally are the most foundational aspect of many songs that we hear in our day today and even days of old.

They stick with you, similar like a worm does within the apple. I still have yet to see a worm and an apple, but the fraying and saying goes true regardless, right?

Those earworms that you just can't get out of your head, they are randomly recalled throughout the day, usually at the most inappropriate times.

Unless you're me, because there's no inappropriate time to bust out in a Christmas carol. Ask my wife. But maybe you recall in the past 10 years, Uptown Funk by Pharrell Williams, right?

Can't get that beat out of your head. Or maybe that hideous song, Call Me Maybe by Carly Rae Jensen. Maybe back a little bit further, Hey Ya by Outkast. Or I Got a Feeling by Black Eyed Peas.

[3 : 42] Songs you just can't get out of your head. Maybe into the 90s, The Macarena. Remember that one? I don't even know who that was written by, but I know The Macarena. Or maybe for you grunge lovers, Smells Like Teen Spirit by Nirvana.

Or back in the 80s, Sweet Child of Mine. Just, you can ring that chorus in your head by Guns N' Roses. Or Beat It by Michael Jackson. Maybe some of you have had the luxury of living in the 70s. I didn't, as you can tell by my wonderful baby face. But I do know the songs, Stayin' Alive. Those who are still stayin' alive who witnessed the 70s by the Bee Gees.

Or Bohemian Rhapsody by Queen. Or those in the 60s, Like a Rolling Stone by Bob Dylan. Or Respect by Aretha Franklin. Right?

We could go on and on. There's many others, like all of these top choruses. Yes, I googled top choruses throughout the decades, and this is what we found. And then, guess who was singing all these songs throughout the day?

[4 : 46] Me. And my family suffered. But, um, even in the church, we have those hymns that are almost timeless. I was talking at a rehearsal today about the one hymn.

It was finished upon that cross. I pray to God that that song is still sung 50 years from now. That song is so wonderful to be sung. There's many things that stick in our minds, but I hope that somebody can give Chris Tomlin a little note that he needs to stop messing with hymns and putting his choruses into hymns.

Now, some of you are... Amen. First amen in the house of the Lord. Now, I know that that might upset some because they like what Chris Tomlin is doing.

We all get our opinions, and my opinion is that he needs to stop. We'll end it there. But all of these choruses, timeless often.

And the specific biblical choruses, if you think of it as well with my soul, that chorus has a specific time frame in mind that is linked to suffering and sort of wondering if God is near.

[6 : 03] One thing about choruses is that they are unforgettable. They stick in your mind so deeply that I don't know if I'm the only one that wishes I could just purge all this senseless lyrics out of my mind and fill it with some Bible verses.

Amen. Right? They're unforgettable. You might be wondering, what the heck I'm talking about? And how does this relate?

Well, this psalm in Psalm 80, written by Asaph, the author, has a similar structure and emphasis revolving around a chorus.

There is a chorus in this song. He wants the people of God to remember. It's written by Asaph. He's a Levitical priest. He records a certain period of time that God's people were singing this chorus. And its emphasis is timeless in that it not only embraces the cry of all humanity going as, restore us, O God.

[7 : 09] Let your face shine that we may be saved. It rings about the Aaronic blessing of Numbers chapter 6. But this is the cry of all humanity.

Hopefully the cry of all humanity. But I believe it's also the cry of the church today who pleads to God when we enter into trouble.

And for that reason, we will dissect the situation. Trouble, you say? I know a lot of situations going on within the congregation right now.

People are walking through trouble. It could be anything from sin to stress to anxiety to apathy or maybe a sense of laziness just kind of tied with apathy.

Or maybe struggling in trouble with doubts and anger all revolving around what God is doing. But I want to encourage you wherever you find yourself in today struggling with today, let's follow Asaph's footsteps in Psalm 80 as a church.

[8 : 33] And I believe that we will discover by the third repetition of that chorus. We will find our souls in this place of experiencing God's mighty shift in our lives to restore us and to revive us.

So for that, the sermon title is All for What? And if you are new today, we have a lot of Bibles available.

I find it most helpful for us to gather with our Bibles open. And as we go through this passage, just keeping your finger on the verse as we go through. And so, I can invite you to turn to Psalm 80 if you guys have a pew Bible.

Somebody call out the page number. In English? 491. 491.

So this, we'll break up into three separate sections just as there's three choruses as the author has intended. But I do want to pray before we dive into the first section.

[9 : 47] So please join me in prayer. Father, we come to you today hopeful for you to speak. some of us longing for you to speak.

Father, give us hope from your word today. And may we see Christ as your church. We praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. The first section that we see is between verse one and three. And these sections just serve to hone in on the theme of what's going on in these verses to remind you as you go back to your notes hopefully later throughout the week or the day.

And so as we see in the first chorus, there's a plea starting in verse one. It says, Give ear, O shepherd of Israel. You have led Joseph like a flock.

You who are enthroned upon cherubim, shine forth. And before these nations and kingdoms, he mentions. And so we know one thing about this reference to a shepherd that it is quite unique.

[11:04] This is the second mention of God being Israel's shepherd, the other one being in the famous Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd. And this is the second, only the second reference to that shepherding.

And so that should perk our ear a little bit in and of itself. Because we're assured that such a plea to a shepherd would originate from the lips of what?

Sheep. Right? A shepherd isn't a shepherd without sheep. And so what's going on here? You have the sheep crying out to their shepherd.

And I'm not going to go into it too in depth. But if you know one thing about sheep, you certainly know that they are not the brightest of all God's creatures.

Maybe not personally, but you should Google some funny images. They're known for being wayward, ruthless, defiant, helpless, and, I know, supremely dumb.

[12:10] I know, those poor sheep. They're not here to defend themselves, but they've lost that chance. This image of the psalm begins with a picture of a shepherd not responding to wayward sheep.

You see, the psalmist calls out, the sheep of God calls out upon the might in verse 1 of their shepherd.

In verse 2, for God to save these northern kingdoms of Israel, two of them being major, massive kingdoms of Israel. The sheep are crying out, church, to an unresponsive shepherd.

How is this? Well, considering this prayer for salvation, it really does put a date on the psalm, which indicates a little bit of a situation, a tense situation between God's people and God.

Because mentioning these kingdoms, knowing that they're still in existence, they have not been destroyed by the Assyrian armies, this dates sometime in 721 B.C.

[13:28] And knowing that time is vital. It's not, I'm just not filling your brains with knowledge, so you get your jeopardy questions right next time we're tuned in. It's vital because I'll preserve you the details of looking this up because during these days, it was tense.

These are tense, dark days. And let me just say this, God had little to no favor of His people at this time. His sheep have certainly gone astray.

Why? Now that's the question to ask because they did not repent of their sins. They did not truly seek after God.

They played games with God. God was more of a convenience for them. The little Jesus card they keep in the back pocket and pull it up whenever it's needed.

You see, Israel at this time were dumb sheep to the fullest extent. Like a child standing on the hot surface of a stove and then pointing at their parents for having the stove.

[14:43] It's senseless self-harm that this nation was enduring. And Jesus Christ said something about this day. What we have here is a day of judgment, a time of judgment in Israel's life and history.

And Jesus had much to say about a day of judgment that's similar during His life. In John 3, 19, He says, and this is the judgment. The light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light lest his works should be exposed.

But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out and gone. This relationship, church, between the shepherd and the sheep crying out to him is truly profound.

And I don't want you to miss that. And I don't want you to miss that this morning. Because what grace that we realize of God in His forbearance nature with His people.

[16:07] Think for a moment. Just as a shepherd isn't a shepherd without his sheep. Just like a truck driver isn't a truck driver without a what? A truck.

This shepherd's identity is tied with belonging to sheep. And here are God's sheep.

They're threatened by being destroyed, these northern kingdoms. They're lost in their sins during this time period. They're calling out to the dark for their shepherd's might to come and save them. And you see something vital. Yes, these sheep lost their way, but never once did they lose their status of belonging to the shepherd.

That is a profound reality that we have to understand. In other words, sheep are sheep. sheep. And we're always going to be sheep.

[17:10] We're always going to be sheep. Obedience will be broken, but their relationship with their shepherd is not so easily broken.

Jesus Christ attributed even to himself of being the good shepherd in John 10. And the shepherd and the overseer of souls, 1 Peter 2, verse 25.

But his goodness being the good shepherd had little to do with his wayward sheep that rejected him in this life, but rather in the goodness of his sure commitment to them.

Meaning that if he's the good shepherd, that attributes who he is to wayward people. This is good news. It's hopeful news. God's sheep call out to their shepherd in these verses, blind and ignorant as they faced destruction and threats, but they knew who their shepherd was.

Church and friends, do you know this shepherd? Thinking in the face of trouble or hardship that comes, it's almost guaranteed that it will cause your faith to struggle.

[18:39] It's the natural reality of hardship. We think that something's wrong with something. We forget our citizenship in heaven being so deeply secure and we forget in the heaven.

We forget in the eternal. we forget the everlasting. We grasp securely in Christ's grip. In church, I know some of you might not be the most flattering version of what a Christian should look like and I might be in there with you if you looked at my life with a microscope.

But a Christian you are and a Christian you will remain. it's a reality that when reflected upon long enough when you think about this sheep and shepherd relationship long enough it will take you to a chorus calling out for restoration.

And with that it takes us to a second chorus of discovery. This being a little bit more inward in verse 4 and we see this prayer going from the prayer to the shepherd to the prayer of the commander.

In verse 4 there is like this verse literally a verse leading up to another chorus in verse 7. Do you see it? Do you see verse 7?

[20:18] Restore us oh God. We just heard that one didn't we? But let's look at the context. He's calling out to a commander oh Lord of Lord God of hosts how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

Look at this analogy. You have fed them with the bread of tears and given them tears to drink not just a little bit but full measure in verse 5.

You make us an object of contention to our neighbors and our enemies laugh among themselves. The second chorus of discovery goes similar to the first but with a little bit of a twist which is significant.

Restore us let's make this one count with this chorus. Let's say restore us oh God of hosts let your face shine that we may be saved.

The second chorus here follows a series of reality checks from verses 4 to 6 for this nation regarding that which is occurring all around them and also within their hearts.

[21:31] In verse 4 the psalmist addresses the Lord's anger against their prayers which reinforces their sheepish plea from verse 1 to 3. If God is silent in verse 1 through 3 we got the answer.

The Lord's angry at their prayers. So we're getting context developing here. It doesn't take a rocket scientist either to figure out that if God is angry with the prayers of His people they're obviously being judged and that is exactly what's going on in this time period within the landscape of history in Israel of God's people.

In verse 5 not only that but the psalmist's discovery intensifies using the illustration of God feeding His people if you could imagine eating at a restaurant and God being the waiter He comes out with a plate of tears and with a cup of tears and that plate and that cup has full reflux.

It's bottomless for them. Verse 6 they've literally become the laughing stock of the entire land. This is heavy church don't let me make you think something like something's wrong no this is heavy and for good reason this is God's word for us and Andrew McLaren mentions that these verses call upon the trilogy of woe meaning it points to an angry God a weeping nation and mocking foes.

It's the trilogy of woe. They cry out to God here for not only the shepherd to lead them not just for the mighty shepherd to lead them mind you but for the mighty commander of all the hosts of angelic armies to come and liberate them still silence.

[23:41] We receive quite a theological insight into the serious nature of unrepentant sin do we not? Definitely how it plays out in many aspects of our lives this world celebrates sin the church rejects sin it's where the world and the church find that friction and it's not it doesn't take long to see that friction playing out and we know one thing about sin within God's people that Psalm 66 David

said it best if I had cherished iniquity in my heart God would not have heard him unrepentant sin consumes our lives in dismay in fear in disconnect and is unheard by our shepherd and commander you might be like buddy it's gonna be okay up there you might think am I being too harsh with you I might argue has Christianity become too soft only a loving God would give silence and tears to his people that he loves have we forgotten the gospel this is discipline why it's not that they weren't praying it's that they're praying the wrong thing you see this nation deserved nothing but destruction all these northern kingdoms it didn't matter if the whole land is mocking them they deserved it and Jesus Christ even if you look at the cross his body was crushed by the weight of sin and church don't think for a moment that unrepentant sin can be played around with among our very lives if this is to you today let this also serve as a reality check to rest deep within your conscience that we don't deserve salvation

I don't deserve salvation and for that the best thing until we realize that is a steady diet of tears what a reality check even I was going through this text and I'm like what are unbelievers going to think about this I don't know if I was an unbeliever I'd be running straight to the cross some unbelievers I mean are blaming their unbelief for a shepherd quote shepherd in their lives not leading them or blame this commander they know that God is mighty but still God didn't save their child that was still born or God didn't do this and it's as if they're blaming the problem of evil but the problem of evil is not necessarily attributed to all the things around but the problem of evil is attributed to the heart that is within that is the problem of evil or have we forgotten in Romans 3 11 none is righteous no not one no one understands no one seeks for

God all have turned aside together they have become worthless no one does good not even one we we can pray we can do all these prayers we can have our flags rolling the tambourine shaking we can have the white tent out front flying and we can pray until our faces blue march around Jericho a million times but we learn something as we come out of the series in 1 Samuel it was a hard lesson that Saul learns that obedience is better than sacrifice guys we have to get real nothing is more powerful than the lips of confession nothing in the church no program prayer meeting yeah those are mighty but through the lips of confession and this second chorus provides a little deeper heart evaluation looking at tears being served crying to the God of hosts but we seem to not be truly resolved yet until this final refrain and I want us to discover that this psalmist not only calls out to the shepherd or the commander but he also calls upon the gardener which is interesting and let's look at that in verse 8 the prayer to the gardener and let me just say

[31 : 06] I love this imagery that Lou read just a couple moments ago verse 8 through 11 imagery that the psalmist used is sort of like an analogy to identifying God as the shepherd of his people his commander but I love this here the transition he takes in identifying God as a gardener of a great vineyard Israel being the vine of his labor this is such a beautiful if you're a creative thinker right side brains I see you and this hits home with my mind I wish I could paint what I see but this is unique in and of itself just as shepherd was only mentioned twice in the book of Psalms we see that Israel being referred to as the vine this is the only occurrence in the entire book of Psalms as Israel being the vine and so that should be significant as well why because verse 8 mentions about the exodus the exodus of

God's people from Egypt and verse 9 leading to the conquest of driving out corrupt nations to plant Israel any green thumbs will know in order to have a good fruitful crop you got to get rid of the weeds and essentially the psalmist is calling upon these past acts of God of clearing the land and fertilizing fertility planting Israel in the soil to grow massively how massive well they use imagery of height and width here in verse 10 look at the height the mountains receive shade of its mighty cedars and look at the width of this growth the branches spread out to the sea and the shoots to the rivers this was a well cared for harvest here this is a well cared for crop a vine of Israel and looking upon the past the psalmist the presence all for nothing all of that all that labor all that clearing of nations all those victories all those times of turmoil struggle and crying out all for nothing

I look upon this church gathered here today and I do see each one of you who I know individually you guys have powerful testimonies have you ever looked upon your life and thought that in the midst of a struggle and a trial you saved me you moved in my life all these things you did and I witnessed them for what now now I suffer I struggle is it all for nothing well as a Christian similar imagery is used of Jesus Christ being the true vine and his father being the gardener in John 15 but though the unifying factor of the imagery is our abiding in him by keeping his word now I don't know about you but it's hard to abide and keep in anything other than doubt when you're in

trouble when you're broken when your life is falling apart you're given every reason to doubt and have a lack of faith than you do of having faith at times if we want to be real I'm all about being authentic and vulnerable as I think all of us should be we struggle in this life we do we should be honest about that the psalmist is in verse 12 the psalmist takes it even deeper though with the metaphor reflecting upon that vulnerable state it doesn't get more vulnerable than verse 12 and 13 as he's describing walls being broken they were built to protect them and here these walls are broken and they're just watching the enemies come in and take of all the fruit of

God's labor in their lives it's making them say we look like a joke like you don't even exist all for what your sheep call you don't answer we're oppressed and you give us tears God our honor is at stake and here we have arrived at the progression of emphasis in the psalm verse 14 turn again oh God of hosts look down from heaven and see have regard for this vine verse 15 the stock that your right hand planted and for the son whom you made strong for yourself the psalmist makes a unique plea here for

[36 : 53] God to turn to them what's the object of this turning it's not at this point due to their plight of verse 1 through 3 it's not due to tears in verse 4 through 7 nor is it even the days of old in verse 8 through 11 all of those reasons focused on the nation now the psalmist realizes what's truly at stake the glory of God have regard for this vine it's not that their plight didn't matter it's not that their tears didn't matter nor salvation of days of old mattered but what began to take shape in this psalm is that the realization that this threat was not really about them it's about God so as the enemy is coming in in verse 16 the glory of God then is being burnt and cut down the glory of

God in verse 17 then has always been Israel's strength in verse 19 the glory of God then is the gaze and the cry of Israel you see church the glory of God is the sole reason the Lord will bring restoration and revival that's not to minimize the regard God has for man but proportionally emphasizing God's glory over man the yearning of the psalmist became shifted in the glory of God being revived amid the depravity of man light in the darkness and while the psalmist obviously didn't know Jesus Christ the son of man as he mentions son here couldn't even fathom him knowing that Jesus Christ was coming but what they yearned for what the desire of their yearning hearts needed was

Jesus Christ Christ the Bible is known for being uniquely Jesus centered and here it is they're yearning for Jesus Christ and you see for that the hope and driving force of repentance is not just relief but God's glory alone and so the nation desired restoration the nation desired revival and this longing within the psalmist heart began with concern for self but upon deeper discovery found that that was actually the problem they were only concerned about themselves they're only concerned about their image their only concern because they put their tent out front and now nothing's happening and nobody showed up and now people are going to laugh at them their only concern was themselves and for that we know that restoration revival only begins face down by the third chorus the solution was found and a new emphasis rings in verse 19 look with me restore us oh lord god of hosts let your face shine that we may be saved now you might ask well Brent wonderful news but that's the same chorus that was reverberated two other times through the song well yeah it is the same but a different context same chorus but we have to know what changed the psalmist began more concerned to be saved from something but by the end it would appear that his concern was actually being saved to someone it's a whole different heart shift of getting out of the penalty of sin or clinging to the cross of

Jesus Christ not just being saved from something but to someone and you might ask well Brent that's great news but guess what I know the Assyrians came this psalm really didn't serve any purpose because they still came they were still destroyed well yes you're right as well but guess what the whole nation needed to realize what Asaph is realizing here in this psalm they needed to realize that they were similarly judged just as we one day will be judged and this is an individual judgment did you know that that as God is bringing about your life on this earth and he's recalling your shortcomings your failings there's no pointing the finger at someone that hurt you there's no pointing the finger at some pastor that abused you there's no pointing a finger at failures of parents this is very personal it's individual and this judgment that occurred in

Israel will happen in our lives every one of you at an individual sense God's concern for you and I gotta hand it to you don't be the reason God's glory is at stake if we're all to fragment all these pieces and the pleadings and the tears and the silence together what we find is that unrepentant sin causes God's glory to be at stake the antonym of God's design and intention for the church is at

stake so you might ask what might this look like to be done well well we would trust less in our power and rely solely upon God's power in all things we have less faith in ourselves and have greater faith in

[43 : 44] God we rest not in our righteousness but in God's righteousness in Jesus Christ the gospel is good news of destruction of sin it's a death to self and a life to something greater and guess what if you don't have destruction you don't have restoration if you don't have death you don't have revival so church just as this psalm is titled restore us oh God let us be okay with being broken church we get a lot of things wrong but let's not get addressing sin wrong let's get that right why because the glory of

God is at stake if God's glory is at stake so is your joy so is your provision so is your protection and the list goes on that's at stake but you know what's not at stake God you belonging to God as a shepherd God being your commander God being your gardener your life may be nothing to all but it is not all for nothing if you live for Jesus Christ the Lord and for that when we ask ourselves all for what all for the glory of God amen let's pray