

The Cry of Korah      FCC 6-28-20

Psa 85:1 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

Psa 85:2 You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin. Selah.

Psa 85:3 You withdrew all your wrath; you turned from your hot anger.

Psa 85:4 Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us!

Psa 85:5 Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?

Psa 85:6 Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

Psa 85:7 Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.

Psa 85:8 Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly.

Psa 85:9 Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land.

Psa 85:10 Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

Psa 85:11 Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.

Psa 85:12 Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.

Psa 85:13 Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way.

Psalm 85 has been read during Christmas in some churches because of its bright pictures of peace, reconciliation, and fruitfulness of land in its final verses. It is a beautiful prayer that was probably set to music. The focal point of the Psalm, around which the rest of the Psalm is formed and united, is verse 4: "Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us!" Some translations say revive instead of restore.

One thing that really influences the way we look at this Psalm is the fact that it was composed by the sons of Korah. You might recall that the name Korah is connected with infamy in Numbers 16. Korah, along with a few people from the tribe of Reuben became insolent when they declared that it was time for a change of leadership- Moses and Aaron had to go. They argued that everyone was holy, so why should Aaron and Moses place themselves over everyone? In response to this, God told Aaron and Moses to tell the people to back away from the tents of Korah and the others involved, and then the earth opened up and swallowed them.

It is possible that the descendants of Korah could have been bitter toward God, toward Moses and Aaron, or toward the rest of Israel in response to this punishment. But thankfully, they repented and received God's mercy and grace, so much so that God used them to write this Psalm, a Psalm that calls the people of God to repentance and revival.

There are four main requests that the sons of Korah lay before the Lord in this Psalm:

- Grant us your restoration as in times past- vs 1-3
- Grant us your joy and love in our times- vs 4-7
- Grant us your peace and presence in our land- vs 8-9
- Grant us your harmony among your people- vs 10-13

These are the prayers of people who have thoroughly repented of deep sin and are seeking God for restoration and revival.

### **Grant us your restoration as in times past- vs 1-3**

Psa 85:1 To the choirmaster. A Psalm of the Sons of Korah. LORD, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob.

Psa 85:2 You forgave the iniquity of your people; you covered all their sin. Selah.

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Hindsight is 2020 right? These psalmists begin by looking back at the things God did. The first three verses contain six past-tense verbs

focused on God's actions toward his people in the past. These six verbs are in a series of three pairs, each pair is focused on one theme for emphasis. The first pair in verse 1 is 'you were favorable' and 'you restored', both referring to God making the land produce abundantly. The second pair in verse 2 is 'you forgave' and 'you covered', both referring to God showering their sin with grace. The third pair in verse 3 is 'you withdrew' and 'you turned', both referring to God completely abandoning his anger toward them.

So when we get to the cry of verse 4, 'restore us again', this is not a request that God should complete a work that is already in progress, as if it sort of started and then ran out of gas. Instead, we get the impression that the past time of restoration they are referring to are quite some time in the past, and the fortunes that resulted from that restoration have long faded and times are dark again. And so this is a request that God would do a new work of restoration to address new misfortunes, a new work of grace to address new sins, and a new work of withdrawing his anger, an anger that is not related to past injustice but to present injustice among his people. These sons of Korah are not asking for forgiveness for what happened in the desert with Moses and Aaron. That is water under the bridge. This psalm is written centuries later and related directly to their nation's circumstances at the time that it is written, but it is written by sons who have a good handle on both the justice of God and the grace of God because their great great grandfathers saw both and passed down the stories. These sons are desperate. In their circumstances they might not have a penny to their name, but they have a family name that reminds them of the power of the God they serve, and their grandpa's stories become their prayers. They have heard of God's power to restore and bless, but they have also heard that the only keycode for that vault of blessings is repentance. Without repentance, any quest for renewal will be dead in the water.

## **Grant us your joy and love in our times- vs 4-7**

Psa 85:4 Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us!

Psa 85:5 Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations?

Psa 85:6 Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

Psa 85:7 Show us your steadfast love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.

As we reflect on the cry of the sons of Korah, we see that they understand something crucial: that restoration and revival are the work of God. They cannot be imitated from what is happening elsewhere. They cannot be self-induced from any special strategy. These sons also know that restoration is a gift of God's love. We will come back to that.

In verse 6 it is evident that these sons of Korah are weary of God's wrath. They wonder if God will be angry forever. This particular question is based completely on emotion. They are tired of their circumstances and that's why they are crying out this way. But theologically they know that God is only angry with the next generation if they continue in the sins of their fathers. God is not angry at anyone for the sins of their ancestors unless they continue in those sins, which many times unfortunately they do.

In verse 6 we see that joy is the result of revival. In fact, joy cannot come without a revival from God, which in turn cannot come without repentance. Therefore, real joy does not come without repentance. These sons of Korah are crystal clear on that point.

In verse 7, The Hebrew word that we translate as love is *hesed*, but its meaning is too rich to be fully captured by any one English word. It includes God's grace and faithfulness in all he has promised to do, and more. The same love that convicts us of sin also calls us to repentance and then revives us and gives us joy.

In verse 7 they are also asking for salvation. But they are not asking to be brought into a relationship with God for the first time or to

be brought into the family of God for the first time. They are asking to be delivered from the consequences of their sins, consequences which they acknowledge are just and deserved, but want to be relieved from them nonetheless.

### **Grant us your peace and presence in our land- vs 8-9**

Psa 85:8 Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly.

Psa 85:9 Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land.

This part of the chapter is interesting because verse 8 is sort of abrupt. The writer is making observations about the past and requests for the present, and all of a sudden he says 'let me hear what God the Lord will speak', almost as if God interrupted this prayer and assured those praying of his peace and salvation.

These verses would have reminded the Israelite readers of this Psalm of the promise of God in Leviticus 26:3-13, in which God stated that he would grant his people peace and abundance and victory and population growth if they would keep his commandments.

Now when the OT talks about peace, the Hebrew for which is Shalom, it has a meaning that is both broad and deep because it encompasses everything that God will do for his people materially, physically, socially, spiritually, and psychologically. This of course is not meant to give credence to a health, wealth, and prosperity gospel because that would be totally individualistic, secular, and me-centered. What is being affirmed here is the same thing that has been true of every work of God prior to the writing of the Psalm and ever since the writing of this Psalm: that wherever the voice of God has been recognized in all of its fullness, there God's people have experienced the peace from God that passes all understanding.

And that peace is not based on any sort of material blessings that God may give, although he does give those, but that peace is based on the people's renewed understanding of their identity in God. The

people of God are called by three names in these two verses: his people, his saints, and those who fear him. It is a privilege to belong to God and to be chosen to be his special possession. Even the people in the messed-up church of Corinth were called saints. It's hard to embrace such a description as our own, but the extent to which we embrace that is the extent to which we will have peace.

And not only have peace, but have God's presence as well. That's what it meant to have the glory of God.

### **Grant us your harmony among your people- vs 10-13**

Psa 85:10 Steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

Psa 85:11 Faithfulness springs up from the ground, and righteousness looks down from the sky.

Psa 85:12 Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.

Psa 85:13 Righteousness will go before him and make his footsteps a way.

As conservative evangelicals sometimes we encounter a tension- that firm adherence to the truth may appear to hinder the display of love and kindness. Striving for righteousness seems to cause tension rather than peace. But when God showers his grace on his revived people, righteousness and peace not only come together, but they embrace and kiss each other. And so the truth, or righteousness, is spoken or acted out in love, or in a way that fosters peace. We cannot manufacture this with any ministry strategy. It happens naturally, which is what is meant by verse 11- that faithfulness springs up from the ground. Sort of like a seed planted in the soil- if it has what it needs, it just grows- it doesn't need convincing. As a result, righteousness looks down from above- in other words, God is pleased.

God is so pleased that he provides what is good. That certainly includes our material needs, but it is so much broader and deeper than that. It describes a society that is healthy and whole. We look forward

to that time in the new heavens and the new earth. Until then, as the last verse says, God will guide our way.

## **Conclusion**

To wrap up what we see expressed so beautifully in this Psalm, there is no spiritual life or vitality without the reviving, restoring power and presence of God. Just like someone experiencing frostbite feels cold and then pain, we feel cold and pain spiritually when we go without the reviving presence of God.

Current blessings are the result of past revivals. But when the repentance, prayer, and faithfulness that opened the door for those revivals become diminished, over time those blessings fade and we begin to feel the pain of cold as a spiritual winter sets in again.

What is our state today? In spite of the heat we feel when we walk outside, do we still feel cold? If so, will we stubbornly stand in the spiritual cold trying to warm ourselves by shivering, or will we cry out to God like the sons of Korah?