

Psalm 80

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Preacher: Paul Johnston

[0 : 0 0] Well, thank you, Johnny, and thank you to all the band for leading us in worship this morning, and thank you to all of you for being here today. I wonder, have you ever sort of had a nightmare whereby you suddenly are told that you have to get up and speak to potentially a fairly large audience of people, and you are utterly unprepared to do so, and you sort of wake up from that nightmare with a startle, and you're very relieved that it wasn't actually real?

Has anybody else had that? You know, I've had it from time to time. Unfortunately, the reality, the nightmare became real when I walked into the church this morning and asked the people in the welcome team whether there was a newsletter available.

There was only one left. Casually scanned it, thinking, I wonder who we'll be hearing from today. Looked and thought, no, I've definitely got the date wrong. Looked again and thought, no, it really is the 9th of October, and checked with Graham. There's been a mix-up. Somebody swapped, didn't they, and the newsletter's just not up to date, and Graham looked at me and said, no, Paul.

Yeah, so here we are, here we are, here we are. And I'm sorry, genuinely sorry, because you've come today here to meet with God and here to listen to God's voice, and generally those who are here are exceptionally well prepared and have spent the week in prayer and preparation, and that's what you're entitled to expect when you come.

So my apologies. So all I can do, as we've been singing to God, is share with you some of what's been on my heart and mind. I'm not going to try and pretend that I'm going to be speaking from the passage that we had in Luke 5.

[1 : 4 4] All I can do is share stuff that's been in my mind, and indeed a passage that I was reading this morning and that I was talking a bit to Sam about, and that led us to be singing a particular song, and that led Sam to go upstairs and get his guitar.

He can't play the guitar, but he got his guitar and he started singing and trying to play this, and he seemed to be enjoying it, and then he got his accordion and started trying to play it in the accordion as well. And so somehow or other, in God's mysterious ways, I trust that I just might, in all my kind of failure and uncertainty and indeed trembling before you, have something to say for some of you, and I want just to speak to you about my sense of the heart of the Father God who we worship today.

The song that we started singing this morning was Good, Good Father. I hope some of you know it. I've heard a thousand stories of what they think you're like, but I've heard the tender whispers of love in the dead of night, and you tell me you're pleased and that I am never alone.

You're a good, good father. It's who you are. It's who you are, and I'm loved by you. It's who I am. It's who I am. I've seen many searching for answers far and wide, but I know we're all searching for answers only you provide, because you know just what we need before we say a word.

You're a good, good father. It's who you are. It's who you are, and I'm loved by you. It's who I am. It's who I am, because you are perfect in all of your ways.

[3 : 20] You are perfect in all of your ways. You are perfect in all of your ways to us. Let's pause and pray. Father God, we come to you this morning, the good, good father, perfect in all of your ways.

Father, we are loved by you. You do not make any mistakes, and so we are before you as your people and your church this morning, inviting you to show yourself to us as the father, who perhaps some of us today just need to know is the father who loves us, is the father who is drawing close.

So speak not through any of my words, but through your words, God, this morning. Speak to us, Father, because we are here, a needy people needing to know more about who you are.

So reveal yourself to us, we pray, God. Amen. So here's the passage. It's Psalm 80. Psalm 80. I invite you to turn to it or read it on the screen.

Part of a small number of Psalms where we see people who, the people of Israel who had known what it was like to be really close to God, but then through their own failure and sin and departure from God had suddenly known separation from God.

[4 : 47] They had no sense of nearness to God, their father, right? And so we come to a point where they're calling out again to God as father and God as shepherd, asking God to reveal himself to them.

And I suppose my starting point is just whether some of us might feel, as we read these passages, yes, we're here and we know God. We've had some sort of experience of God in our lives in the past, maybe through becoming a Christian when we were young children.

But for whatever reason, I believe there'll be some of us here today and God seems distant. We're not sure really whether he is hearing and responding to our cries, in which case just maybe this Psalm has got something in it for us.

So let's read it together. Hear us, Psalm 80 verse 1. O Lord God Almighty, How long will your anger smolder against the prayers of your people?

You have fed them with the bread of tears. You have made them drink tears by the bowl full. You have made us a source of contention to our neighbours, and our enemies mock us.

[6 : 24] Restore us, O God Almighty. Make your face shine upon us that we may be saved. You brought a vine out of Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it.

You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its boughs to the sea.

It shoots as far as the river. Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? Bores from the forest ravage it, and the creatures of the field feed on it.

Return to us, O God Almighty. Look down from heaven and see. Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the sun you have raised up for yourself.

Your vine is cut down. It is burned with fire. At your rebuke, your people perish. Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

[7 : 33] Then we will not turn away from you. Revive us, and we will call on your name. Restore us, O Lord God Almighty.

Make your face shine upon us that we may be saved. What I'd like to do is just look at four of the real cries that come from this passage, and then look at just some of the ways in which I think, the way in which we see God revealed to us in the New Testament through Jesus Christ, help us understand how these cries can become our cries, but also give us perhaps a new confidence in Christ that God does indeed come near, that God does hear us, that God does restore us, that God does want to shine upon us, and that God does want to watch over us.

Those are the four things that have really struck me from this passage that I'd like just to take a few minutes on. And firstly, it's there in verse one. Hear us, O shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock.

Their cry at the very start is just that confidence that God hears them. Hear us, O Lord our God.

And my children this morning, for some reason, got into a discussion about how it is that we can actually communicate with God and be sure that he hears us.

[9 : 05] And Ben, my son who's nine, has just recently got a phone with a SIM card, so he's really enjoying the whole experience of texting and making phone calls. And he started saying, I wonder if sometimes you're trying to speak to Jesus, and it's a bit like phoning and getting the engaged tone, and actually he's too busy to speak.

And there was a child just thinking through and wondering whether sometimes Jesus is too busy to actually hear us. I wonder if we look at ourselves this week, whether we've taken the time to actually speak to God, and whether we've had the confidence that God is hearing us.

Let's just look at the way in which Jesus would speak to us about this, the way in which Jesus would encourage us to look at our Father and to see in our Father someone who always wants to hear us and someone who will respond to us.

And so the words of Jesus himself in Matthew chapter 7 and verse 9, he says, Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake?

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?

[10 : 33] How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him? Here is our Lord Jesus encouraging us to ask our Father for all that we need and to be absolutely sure that unlike even, well, even more than a good earthly father, our heavenly Father is waiting to listen, to answer, and to respond.

I know certainly as I think about myself as an earthly father, I am certainly not always ready to hear and respond to my children. Certainly not when I was through there in the room in the last hour trying to prepare and I heard Sam calling out, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, where is my teddy?

No, I don't have time. I don't have time. I can't listen and deal with you and engage with you just now. And here is our heavenly Father who maybe just wants to assure some of us this morning, he's a good, good Father.

He's ready to hear us and he's ready to respond. Hear us, Father. But then there seems to be a chorus in this passage.

I don't know if you noticed it, but it's repeated three times. Psalm 80, verse 3, Restore us, O God. Make your face shine upon us that we may be saved.

[11 : 51] Verse 7, Restore us, O God Almighty. Make your face shine upon us that we may be saved. Verse 19, Restore us, O Lord God Almighty.

Make your face shine upon us that we may be saved. I wonder if some of us are here knowing that our relationship with the Father is not as it should be.

Knowing that although we've come and maybe we've been able to sing and enter into it, knowing that although we are pleased to be here and maybe meet some of our friends, if we look deep into our hearts, we know that the relationship with our Father is broken.

And maybe the cry of our heart as we pause, as we just reflect this morning, is, Father, restore me. Maybe some feel they have never really known what it is to have a relationship with the Father.

And as I think of the Father and my own understanding built up over my years of seeking to follow Jesus, at the very heart of my faith and my understanding of who God is, comes the picture of the Father that we see in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15.

[13 : 06] And as I think of that cry of the psalmist saying, restore us, O God. I think of the cry of the prodigal son as he sits there and looks at the pigs eating those husks and realizes how far away he has got from his father.

And the cry of his heart there is, I wonder if there's still the possibility, even the merest possibility, of restoration of relationship with my father.

Is it too late or is it still possible that I could be restored to some sort of relationship? Not father, son. That's impossible. Maybe slave and master.

Maybe that might be possible. And so let's pick it up and remind our hearts and souls of these verses in Luke 15. And we see the son and verse 20 getting up.

So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

[14 : 15] The son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, Quick, bring the best robe and put it on him.

Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate. Praise God that this passage is captured here in scripture for all of us to get this marvelous insight into the heart of our father.

Jesus himself presents the father as the one who longs to have restored relationship with his children. Presents the father as the one who isn't there filled with grudges, isn't there ready to condemn and rebuke, but when he sees his son turn around, turn away from his sin and his rebellion and take those tentative, doubt-filled steps back towards the father's house is one who then runs towards the son, throws his arms around him and kisses him, who says to his servants, quick, let's have a feast.

Let's celebrate. Is there a desire in our hearts this morning not only to know what it is for God to hear us, but to know what it is to have restored relationship with our father?

[15 : 58] I believe that in Jesus Christ, as the one whom we've sung about, who makes the way open between God and man, it is always possible, no matter where we are, no matter what we've done, to know what it is to have restored relationship with God the father.

And maybe some of us have been messing around in our own equivalent of eating the food that the pigs are eating. And maybe some of us recognise how deeply unsatisfactory that is when somehow or other we've heard echoes of the father's love in our hearts or in all that we've known and heard about in the past.

And the father is calling us to turn and to take those steps towards him and he wants to assure us again of his loving embrace and allow us to know the reality of restored relationship with God.

Hear us, restore us. And then the really beautiful thing in this psalm which captured my mind as I looked this morning and thought of the sun shining and what a beautiful morning it really was.

And then three times as part of this chorus, not just hear us, not just restore us, but shine upon us. Father God shine upon us that we may be saved.

[17 : 19] Is it our cry that as we look at the brightness of the sun we might know the reality of God the Father shining upon us?

That was the essence of the priestly blessing that God gave to Moses in Numbers chapter 6 where he said, tell Aaron and his sons, this is how you are to bless the Israelites, say to them, the Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.

So they will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them. Isn't it a marvellous thought that we can know what it is to have God's face shine upon us?

and in Christ, this is exactly what is offered to us this morning because we can turn to our New Testament and we can read in 2nd Corinthians 4 verse 6, God who said, let light shine out of darkness made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

[18 : 40] But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us. God, the Father who this morning not only says he will hear us, not only says he will restore us, but the God who offers to make his face shine upon us.

What a blessed people we are to know the reality of God's light shining in our hearts, allowing us to know God, and as this passage in 2 Corinthians says, to know God in the face of Christ.

God, please hear us. God, please restore us. God, please shine upon us. And then finally, the final phrase that has just captured my mind is this verse, watch over.

Let's look to verse 14, return to us, O God Almighty, look down from heaven and see, watch over this vine, the root your right hand has planted, the sun you have raised up for yourself.

And I love that sense of the people of Israel who have wandered away from God, almost calling to God and saying, God, remember that you've done great things in us, you've done great things among us, we are your people, we are the ones whom you have planted, we are the ones who have been taken and you've been turning us into something really amazing.

[20 : 22] But without you, without the light of your face shining on us, we will be absolutely nothing, and so we're calling on you, God, to watch over this vine, to watch over what you have planted, because if you don't, then we know we will simply wither and we'll come to absolutely nothing, so watch over us, God.

And again, if I reflect very, very simply on what Jesus brings to us and how Jesus reveals God the Father to us, I'm turned again to his words and to John chapter 15, where again we get the image of gardening, where again we get the image of the vine, and in John chapter 15, verse 5, we read this, I am the vine, you are the branches.

If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers.

Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. Can we just dwell on verse 9 for a moment? Can we just reflect on it?

[21 : 48] Can we just try and let it sink down into our hearts as we hear so many competing voices about what's important, as we hear so many things about how people value us, how they see us, as we have so many pressures, perhaps from all sorts of angles, and we hear these words from Jesus as he speaks about the good, good Father and he says this, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now remain in my love. Can we see ourselves like those branches, like those branches connected to Jesus the vine?

And can we say to God, God, would you watch over us? Please don't leave us because we know that we will wither if we are not subject to your constant loving care.

And then we hear Jesus saying, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you and remain in my love. So, I wonder if there's something for us in Psalm 80.

I wonder if this morning, we can look to God and we can say, God, please hear us. God, please restore us. God, please shine upon us.

[23 : 04] God, please watch over us. For some of you, maybe it's new to Edinburgh, maybe it's involved in a whole new set of experiences. If you're starting student life and there's many temptations with at least the perception of new found freedom to perhaps just wander away from some of that faith that you know of and that you've heard of and that you've experienced through childhood, through teenage years.

In which case, just maybe there's a word from God, the good, good Father, who says he wants to hear you. No matter what you've done in the last days or weeks, restoration is possible.

that through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice and through making a way, he wants to shine upon you and he will watch over you. Maybe it's a word not just for young people, but maybe it's a word for those who are much older, who maybe in some ways have just given up a little bit, maybe just not really thriving in terms of that relationship with God, in which case, please take again, despite my weakness and failure, a word from God which says he wants to hear you, he wants to restore you, he wants to make his face shine upon you, and he will watch over you if you just turn to him again.

Maybe it's something for us as a church. As we are in this period of really looking to God for what he wants to do with us in the future, as we prepare to say goodbye to John, our pastor, and we're seeking God together.

We say, God, our good, good Father, would you hear us? Would you restore us? Would you shine your face upon us? Imagine what's going to go on here if we know the reality of God's face shining upon us.

[25 : 06] And God, as we face difficult decisions and many uncertainties, would you watch over us? let's pause and let's pray together. Father God, we just ask you to draw so close to each one of us.

And in this moment, as we just pause, would you reveal yourself to us as the good, good Father? Maybe as we reflect on the words of Jesus as he talked about how the Father would be ready to respond.

Maybe as we think about Jesus telling us that story of the prodigal son and the father who was ready to see restored relationship. Maybe as we think of how you, Lord Jesus, are the one who shines in our hearts.

Maybe as we remember that you are the vine and we are simply the branches and we are told to remain in you and to have real assurance that then we can know what it is to be loved by you and we can know your presence and power and peace.

So, Lord, I just ask that you would be present with each one of us, draw near, speak to us.
May we go away more assured that we worship a good, good Father.

[26 : 36] Amen. Seventeen. We need us the one one one one one