

**"RESTORATION AND SALVATION"**

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Tell me it isn't true? Somebody, please tell me it isn't true? Tell me that today, November 30, isn't the first Sunday of Advent? Weren't we just getting used to the New Year, 2008, and now, we only have less than 4 weeks and many of us will be gathering here again, on the holiest of nights to celebrate the birth of the Savior of the World, Jesus Christ? I mean, I was in shock the first week of November when I heard a bell ringing at Acme #1 on West Market St. close to where we live. As I walked into that grocery store I looked over and there, holding a bell in her hand was Anna Kelly, a member of our church, ringing the Salvation Army bell as she stood next to the kettle. So tell me it isn't so? OK, even if you tell me an untruth, the reality is, it IS SO.

Given all that has taken place in our country in recent months and the plight of the US economy, not to mention the world's economy, the banking and leading woes, the car industry that is on the brink of disaster, and the list can go on-and-on, I wonder if there are people who are turning to God or turning back to God and to the church? And let me just add, what a great place to turn to not only during the difficult times but in the good times. I mean are we seeing a few more people because they have come to the realization that they need to connect or reconnect with the Creator of the universe and address the spiritual dimension of their lives?

In his book on American revivalists entitled, *The Spiritual Awakeners*, Keith J. Hardman puts forth five phases of God's working. First, he indicates that revival is usually preceded by a time of spiritual depression, apathy, or gross sin. Second, he reports that a small group of God's people become conscious of its sin and backslidden condition, repents, and longs for a new outpouring of God's grace.

Third, leaders spring up with prophetic insights into the causes and remedies for the current problems. A new revelation of God's holiness stimulates a yearning after that holiness by God's people. Fourth, the awakening occurs, and it may both renew the church and evangelize those outside the church. And fifth, the awakening just may be God's preparation to uplift and strengthen His people for future trials, tribulations and challenges.

Let me read a quote that was made by Arthur M. Schlesinger, who was an outstanding historian of the United States and an influential activist in the Democratic Party. What was unique was the extent to which he brought his scholarship to bear upon his partisan politics. He said, "The acceleration of change compels us to perceive life as motion, not as order; the universe not as complete, but as unfinished." And, taking what Schlesinger said, see if you can tell me the decade when Rev. Donald Williams who was pastor of the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of the Coast in San Diego said this, "We are in a time of great spiritual depression that is the consequence of a whole

world-view shift to relativism.... This has resulted in moral anarchy, producing a long list of abuses including abortion, drug addiction, child abuse, incest, white-collar crime, divorce, sexual exploitation, pornography, and the idealization of greed, lust, materialism, [sexual perversion], and violence." In what decade was this said? How about the 80's.... Almost 30 years ago, and maybe you thought this decade?

Yes, these are difficult times with the economy and foreclosures and the jobless rate. We have just weathered the elections and God bless President Elect Obama and the major issues and decisions he faces. We live in a time when only 18% of the American population is practicing their Christian faith on any given Sunday and so I really do wonder will we, could we see people returning to God because things have gotten so bad, because they/we have hit bottom?

Rock bottom is a terrible place to be, a terrible thing to experience. It is a situation that can leave you feeling totally alone with feelings of

detachment and separation from others. If you have ever hit rock bottom you know what I am talking about, but try and imagine what it must feel like for an entire nation to hit rock bottom concerning their relationship with God. Such was the case of nation of Israel that we read about in Psalm 80, which, by the way, is a lament. And here, in these few verses we have the nation of Israel experiencing what Keith Hardman identifies as the five phases of God's working and preparing people for spiritual awakening.

It is obvious that Israel had fallen upon difficult times and that God's people needed His favor of some kind of restoration. The word "Israel" is mentioned in verse 1 and may refer to the whole nation, to the Northern tribes, for in verse 2 the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh are listed which are parts of the Northern Kingdom. But whomever it is referring to- the nation or the Northern tribes, this Psalm speaks of gross sin and apathy which characterize the life of the people of God. And yet this is not directly stated in Psalm 80 because judgment has already happened.

That is why the Psalmist cries out in verse 3, "Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved." Referring back to Hardman's five phases of God's working for spiritual awakening, verses 4 and 16 tell us that God is angry- vs. 4, "how long will you be angry," and vs.16, "may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance." Verse 16 reports that Israel's "hedges" or fences are broken down and the land is ravaged, burned and cut it down. After all of this, there is a time of repentance and verse 4 tells us that the people are actually praying. Verses 3, 7 and 19 find the people calling for restoration and in verse 18 they call for revival. Verse 5 finds the people weeping over their condition. Verse 14 tells us that they cry to God to return to them, to see them, and to visit them once again. Found here, in Psalm 80 is a prayer for restoration, a prayer for revival, a prayer for salvation.

If you look in your Bibles right under Psalm 80 it has written, "To the leader: on Lilies, a Covenant. Of Asaph. A Psalm."

Asaph is identified in the book of Ezra as the ancestor of the temple singers, and the book of Chronicles places him in Solomon's time as a chief musician.

So this Psalm could come from him or from a guild of temple singers called by his name. So here we have Asaph or a guild of temple singers

discouraged over the plight of the Israelites and he/they write and then sing,

in verses 1-3, "You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth...

come to save us! Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be

saved." There is desperation in these words of praise. Please, O God, let

your holy face shine on us again. You see, Asaph knew his people were held

captive by not only from a national enemy that was holding them captive,

but from their captivity to sin. And this sin was so great that it had

provoked God and caused God to even turn away from His people. And so

there is this plea with God to turn toward His people and let them see His

shining face once more. Friends, **Asaph knew that God's shining face is**

**salvation.**

The only solution for the plight of the people of Israel would be able to come from Almighty God- this was true back in Asaph's time, it has been true down throughout the ages, it is still true today.

Look with me at **the very first word that appears in verses 3, 7 and 19- what is that word? Restore**, Restore us, O God. And this is precisely the theme of this Psalm- Restore, restore us, O God or return us, O God. This very cry for restoration into a right relationship with God will then bring about a restoration of Israel's fortunes. And with restoration means the opportunity to see God's shining face. For when God is angry, He turns His gaze away and when God is gracious, He returns His gaze to us.

These words from Asaph were not unfamiliar words- for centuries at the end of every worship service, the Levite priests spoke a solemn benediction that called for God's shining face. They would pray, "The Lord bless you and keep you; / The Lord make His face shine upon you; / And be

gracious to you; / The lord lift up His countenance upon you, / And give you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26) Friends, they wanted to see God's shining face.

God had shown His shining face time and time and time again for His people- the release from captivity in Egypt. The food God provided- the quail and the manna as they roamed the desert wilderness for 40 years; the victories over their enemies prior to entering the Promised Land; entrance into the Promised Land; and on and on. But they still sinned. Friends, when God is displeased with His people He must turn His face from them. And yet, time and time again God hears the cries of His people and He listens and responds. For our God's love and mercy never ends and He does not turn away from His people forever. And so when He heard the cries of His people for a Savior, and knowing that the time was right, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, who could be the only way by which the people could be saved from their sins. God had given His people His holy word in writing, but the writings couldn't save them from their sins, for they had failed to

keep His word. Now God would once again turn His shining face towards them and give them the Word in the Flesh- Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. And so there would be, in Jesus Christ, true Restoration, true Deliverance, true Salvation.

Friends, as we begin this Advent season today, even though things are difficult and times are tough, I want us all to pray that this Advent and Christmas season will be the best ever for us- spiritually. That even if we do without all the trimmings that we are accustomed to at Christmas, less gifts and less on the materialism of Christmas it will be time of spiritually connecting with God and with those we love. Let's pray for a spiritual awakening in our own lives and in the life of our country as we prepare to celebrate the greatest gift of all- Jesus Christ. Let's make daily prayer and Bible reading a priority this Advent and Christmas season; let's make family a priority- our God-given family and our church family. Let's leave at the Communion Table our sins and regrets and should have's and could have's

and start afresh. Let's pray for spiritual revival personally, corporately as a church and as a nation.

A Bazaar was held one day in a village of northern India. Everyone brought his wares to trade and sell. One old farmer brought in a whole covey of quail. He had tied a string around one leg of each bird. The other ends of all the strings were tied to a ring which fit loosely over a central stick. He had taught the quail to walk dolefully in a circle, around and around, like mules at a sugarcane mill. Nobody seemed interested in buying the birds until a devout Brahman came along. He believed in the Hindu idea of respect for all life, so his heart of compassion went out to those poor little creatures walking in their monotonous circles. "I want to buy them all," he told the merchant, who was elated. After receiving the money, he was surprised to hear the buyer say, "Now, I want you to set them all free." "What's that, sir?" "You heard me. Cut the strings from their legs and turn them loose. Set them all free!" With a shrug, the old farmer bent down and

snipped the strings off the quail. They were freed, at last. What happened?

The birds simply continued marching around and around a circle. Finally,

the man had to shoo them off. But even when they landed some distance

away, they resumed their predictable march. Free, unfettered, released, yet

they kept going in circles as if still tied... Salvation cuts the strings of sin.

It's time to stop marching and start flying. (Charles Swindoll, *The Finishing*

*Touch*)

May this Season of Advent be a time when we all fly and know that we can because of a loving God who sent His only Son to restore and save us.

Amen.

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Introduction: Tell me it isn't true? Somebody, please tell me it isn't true?

Given all that has taken place in our country in recent months... are people turning to God or turning back to God and to the church?

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First, revival usually is preceded by...

Second, a small group of God's people become...

Third, leaders spring up with...

Fourth, the awakening occurs...

Fifth, the awakening just may be God's preparation to uplift and...

**Rock Bottom** is a terrible place to be...

Psalm 80- Israel had fallen upon difficult times and God's people needed His favor and some kind of restoration

Vs. 4 & 16 God is \_\_\_\_\_

Vs. 16 The land is ravaged, burned and cut down

Vs. 4 The people are \_\_\_\_\_

Vs. 3, 7 & 19 The people are calling for \_\_\_\_\_ and Vs. 18 they call for \_\_\_\_\_

Vs. 5 The people are \_\_\_\_\_ over their condition

Vs. 14 They cry to God to \_\_\_\_\_ them, to \_\_\_\_\_ them, and to \_\_\_\_\_ them once again

"To the leader: on Lilies, a Covenant. Of Asaph. A Psalm."

Asaph knew that God's shining face is \_\_\_\_\_

**The first word that appears in verses 3, 7 & 19 is \_\_\_\_\_**

The Levite Priests' blessing- "The Lord bless you..." Num. 6:24-26

This Advent Season...

Conclusion: May this Advent be a time when we all fly and know that we can, because of a loving God who sent His only Son to restore and save us