

**You showed favor to your land, O LORD;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.**

**² You forgave the iniquity of your people
and covered all their sins. *Selah***

**³ You set aside all your wrath
and turned from your fierce anger.**

**⁴ Restore us again, O God our Savior,
and put away your displeasure toward us.**

**⁵ Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong your anger through all generations?**

**⁶ Will you not revive us again,
that your people may rejoice in you?**

**⁷ Show us your unfailing love, O LORD,
and grant us your salvation.**

**⁸ 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.**

**⁹ Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.**

**¹⁰ Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.**

**¹¹ Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.**

**¹² The LORD will indeed give what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.**

**¹³ Righteousness goes before him
and prepares the way for his steps. (NIV 84)**

Theme: Restore us, O Lord.

Kim likes to watch a lot of HGTV—the Home and Garden Network. The station has all kinds of shows about fixing up and flipping old houses, remodeling, and restoring or repurposing old pieces of furniture and things like that. They are some of the most popular T.V. shows on cable T.V. It is interesting to watch old become new

again—to see the transformation of something broken and beaten down, to see it restored to its former glory, or even made better. It kind of reminds me of what the Lord does with all of us.

We don't know the exact purpose of this psalm—why it was written or its original use. But many have seen references in this psalm to the return of the exiles to Jerusalem. Because of the people's sin, God's wrath and fierce anger came upon them and he allowed Judah and Jerusalem to be destroyed and the people taken to Babylon in captivity. About 50 years after the destruction of Jerusalem God forgave the sins of his people; he covered over their offenses, setting aside his wrath and turning from his fierce anger. He led a remnant of his children back from exile—he took them back to Jerusalem. And so he showed favor once again to the Promised Land and restored the fortunes of his people.

So the Psalmist praised the Lord that he did not hold their sins against them. They were sinners who deserved his wrath and punishment, and God had punished them in the past, but God in his grace had forgiven them. They knew and believed that God is a gracious God who covers over our sins and releases us from their condemnation. He had forgiven them and brought them back from exile.

Our sinful nature likes to downplay sin—to pass it off as if it's no big deal. We sin every day; we know that, but so does everyone else. So it doesn't really matter—it's not as if God hates us more than any other person.

But we have talked recently about how serious sin is to God—each and every sin, not just some of them. The devil tried to convince the Israelites that their sins weren't that big of deal; that they were God's chosen nation and no matter what they did God wouldn't reject them. But then God's wrath came upon them and his fierce anger he let them be taken into exile, their city and his temple completely destroyed. This Psalm recognizes our problem with sin; God is a consuming fire who burns up sinners and sin.

And yet, this Psalm also relates that despite God's intense hatred for sin, he freely and fully forgives us. Listen to verses two and three again, **You forgave the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins. You set aside all your wrath and turned from your fierce anger.** God has every right to be angry at our sins; but in love he turns

away from that fierce anger; by a gift of his grace he sets aside his wrath and doesn't treat us as our sins deserve.

This love led him to forgive his people and bring them back from exile. It was love that led him to send his Son, Jesus, into this world. And it was love that led Jesus to give himself as a sacrifice for our sins, covering over our sins and thus paying for the forgiveness of our sins. Despite all the evil we have done; we know that we are forgiven in Christ—and that we stand before him as pure and innocent. And so, Christ reconciles us back to God, he restores us to a right relationship with our Father—that relationship was broken when we fell into sin; but it is restored by the sacrifice of Christ; we are considered pure and innocent, God's own children.

The Israelites who returned from exile knew that God had forgiven them and would be with them. But not everything wasn't going well for them. Their enemies tried to do all they could to stop them from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem—and they succeeded for quite some time. They also planted a lot of seed but because of a drought, much of it didn't come up.

They knew they were forgiven and they were finally back home in the Promised Land; but they also knew not everything was perfect. They longed for a better time; they anticipated something better; they wanted even more of God's grace. The Psalmist offers up a prayer to God, **Restore us again, O God our Savior and put away your displeasure toward us... 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.**

We too know that we are forgiven—because of Christ we know where we stand before God. And yet, we are still sinners. We are part of the Church militant, constantly in battle against our sinful nature—a battle we often lose. We also face the problems of living in a sin-filled world, sickness, pain, and sorrow are just some of the things we face on a regular basis—death is another we all face—first the death of our loved ones and then our own deaths.

So we long for something else—we look for and anticipate something greater. For the Israelites, they longed for God blessing them in their home land; but more importantly they looked for the coming of Christ. For the Savior of the world; one from their own line, who would save his people from their sins.

For us today, Christ came and paid for our sins 2000 years ago. And we thank the Lord for that and we'll celebrate his coming in a few short weeks. And when Christ came he did complete our salvation. But not everything is perfect—yet.

We long for something else, we long for something greater. During the season of advent we not only look back at Christ's first coming as the babe in Bethlehem; but we also look forward to and pray for the return of the king of kings and Lord of lords. At that time, he will raise our bodies to be perfect and glorious just as he is. And body and soul together—perfect and holy, we will live in heaven with our Savior. And there in heaven we will enjoy an eternal life free from sin and all its effects.

And look what the Lord promises his people in the final section of our Psalm—verse 8 and following: Peace, salvation, glory, love, faithfulness, righteousness, and what is good. How gracious and amazing is our God! The Israelite enemies wanted anything but peace; but God would allow them to rebuilt the wall and would bring to bring about peace. But more importantly he would bring about the peace of forgiveness—the peace of mind knowing that their sins weren't counted against them; that they would go to heaven with him when they die instead of where they deserve. And how did they know that? Because salvation was near to them! Through faith in him they would be saved! The love of God would smile upon them. He would consider them righteous, or perfect and holy in his eyes.

They longed for something better, and God answered that prayer by sending Christ! The coming of the Messiah—the birth of Jesus, the world's Savior, who would scorn the shame of the cross in our place and rise from the dead for our eternal life. He brought them and the entire world peace, salvation, and glory.

Has Christ completed our salvation already? Yes—but it's not fully realized this side of heaven; and not seen by all until Judgment Day. So again, during advent we take the time to praise and thank Christ for coming down from heaven to save us and that the same time we long and pray for his second coming—his coming to take us home to be with him in heaven forever. Then we will completely realize all that he has done for us and enjoy freedom from our sin and peace from a sin-filled world.

And just as he answered the Psalmist's prayer by sending Christ, so he will answer our prayers. And we will be restored. Like making something new again, taking the old, the worn-out, the beat-down and making it new again—even better. That is what the Lord does for us. Sin, that separates us from God? Removed by Christ! He restores us to a right relationship with God—reconciling us together with our Father. And on the last day, body and soul will be together again, perfect and holy—without sin just as God made us and intended us to be! Yes, it is the Lord who restores us, body and soul, in perfect unity. Today we thank God for his gift of saving us and long for his coming again so we can be fully restored for eternity. Amen.