



good shepherd
presbyterian church

God Speaks Peace

Psalm 85:8-13

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Do you need peace? Or do you need to be reminded of God's peace?

One of the great things about music and songs is that they can remind us of things we've forgotten. The pressures, disappointments, and stuff of life can crowd out things we need to think about, but music can get past our guard and into our soul. This Christmas season we have been looking at the Psalms as the songs of God's people, to be reminded of those essential Advent themes of hope, love, joy, and peace. Today we are looking at part of Psalm 85 that reminds us of God's peace.

Peace and Salvation

Most of the scripture we read today describes God's peace. I want to look at that with you first, then we'll look at some other bits you don't want to miss. The heart of this song is in verses 8-9. As is the way of Hebrew poetry, there is lots of repetition. And so we get this double-promise:

*“God will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones...
surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him...” (vv.8b, 9a)*

Peace and salvation... not meant to be two distinct things here, but two ways of talking about the same thing, the same gift from God. And indeed, sometimes we talk about salvation as “God making peace where there was no peace”... that is, between God and us. We could not heal or

undo the rift of sin and our disobedience, but God made a way and came after us to restore our relationship with Him.

And then what follows in verses 10-13 unpacks and details this salvation, this peace, with cascading images and phrases giving us a sense of the richness of what God has done:

*“Lovingkindness and truth have met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”*

Those are the pairs of contrasting things that we’ve talked about before, that God holds together. We tend to gravitate toward one or the other, toward love or toward truth, toward being right or toward making peace. But God holds them all together like two people in love; what an image! Using the same words the song moves to an image of heaven and earth, then farming, then walking a path. It’s so much packed into a few lines of a song!

What parts of it grab your attention? Is it the picture of the people in love, or earth meeting heaven, or planting crops that will yield a harvest? Is it being led into the unknown by what God says is right?

I think we need this song and these images all the time, but maybe especially now. We don’t know what’s coming in 2021; we see friends, family, and loved ones arguing over truth, over being right. We long for peace and for this rich kind of existence that can handle tough love and reconciliation that takes into account justice, right and wrong.

And that’s the good news ushered in by the coming of Jesus Christ. God HAS spoken peace to us; God has brought salvation near. Romans reminds us, beginning with a quote from the Torah, “The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart... that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:8-9; cf. Deuteronomy 30:14)

And that salvation isn't just a ticket to heaven, but life with the richness and peace described in Psalm 85, as God offers those who listen, believe, and follow.

A Why and a Warning (v.8b, 9b)

I mentioned some extra bits in Psalm 85. In addition to the description of God's salvation and peace, it contains a WHY and a WARNING.

First, why has God made peace and salvation? It is in the second part of verse 9: *"That Glory may dwell in our land."* Remember the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1-3? God walked with Adam and Eve, was present with them. Our sin separated us from the presence or the glory of God, but God's salvation restores us to God's presence. When we hear that God's salvation is near, it is a reminder that God will once more live and move among us. The separation is ending. I am reminded of one of the names given to God's Messiah through the prophet Isaiah and quoted in Matthew:

*"Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel,
which translated means, 'God with us.'"
(Matthew 1:23; cf. Isaiah 7:14)*

Why has God made peace and salvation? It is so we can once again dwell in the presence and glory of God.

What about the WARNING I mentioned? It's there at the end of verse 8: *"But let them not turn back to folly."* How well the Psalmist (and God) knows me, knows humanity! We can have the best thing in the world, but it is so easy to slip back into folly, into sin. And it's not just from lack of paying attention. Later in the New Testament the Apostle Paul warns against using God's grace as an excuse to sin: Just because God forgives doesn't mean we should flaunt our sin. That is folly, indeed. So I won't belabor it; it's just one short phrase in this magnificent song after all. But

don't ignore it either; at the news of God's peace and salvation, don't turn BACK, turn TOWARD God!

I Will Hear What the Lord Will Say (v.8a)

As a good guard against that folly, look at the beginning of our text, the first part of verse 8: *"I will hear what God the Lord will say."* That's what marks the difference between wisdom and folly as well as the difference between the "godly ones who fear Him" and those who don't. Today you have heard the Good News of God's peace and salvation, just as shepherds did all those years ago and just as people have time and time again in the years since.

What will you do with that news? What will you do with this song that speaks of God's peace and salvation, of life that holds together love and truth, righteousness and peace? Will you hear what the Lord will say? Will you believe and follow that Word? That's how God lights up this world with hope. That's how God lights up your life and my life with hope. May it be so!