

# Psalms

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 19 April 1970

Preacher: Farley, J John (1903-1980)

[ 0 : 00 ] If the Lord will help me, I will try to speak to you this afternoon on a subject you will find in Psalm 80, verse 14.

Psalm 80, verse 14. We turn, we beseech thee, O God of hosts, look down from heaven and behold and visit this vine.

This vine we read in the psalm, the Lord had made room for and planted it.

Now, they are mourning because it would appear that the Lord has forsaken his own handiwork and is allowing this vine to be wasted, devoured by war beasts.

I trust there are still a few today sufficiently concerned about the state of Zion and the children of God generally to realise that things are not with us as in former times, sufficiently concerned to betake ourselves more earnestly to pray along the lines of the words I have read this afternoon as the subject for our meditation, as that meditation may be given.

[ 2 : 14 ] There are, in these few words, certain very encouraging aspects, as well as the sadder ones.

I have referred already to some occasion for sadness, the apparent low state of Zion at the present time.

The diminishing which is so widespread today in certain causes of truth, indeed in many causes of truth of varying denominations.

It is not restricted to one. Although there is one, which seems to be, as we say, to put it simply, on the upgrade, but could we go with them?

We need hardly mention who they are, but their places are full because there are things which attract human nature, are made palatable and pleasant for them, and the way to heaven, made as easy as is possible for it to be made.

[ 3 : 38 ] We need say no more. The present state of Zion is that of trial, exercise, diminishing, lack of outward manifestation of much favor, yet still maintained, still containing a few, who, who, occasionally anyway, sigh and cry, for the abomination done in the land, and the apparent desolations in the Lord's benya.

That's the sad aspect. Might have to return to it, couldn't say. But now to look at that which is more hopeful, more encouraging for a moment, in the first word.

Return. This doesn't speak of total absence, unawareness of God, no communion with him, no knowledge of him, does it?

The reverse applies. He has visited. He has blessed. Those who utter these words know what God is, to some extent, and what God can do.

They know that in his favor there is life. They know that in his presence there is happiness. They know that when he is near, they can endure.

[ 5 : 26 ] They know him to be a God who hears and answers prayer. And yet they're at the present time perhaps saying, that he has withheld answers.

Why art thou silent unto me? I cry and shout and he shutteth out my prayer. That's been the experience of the servants of God, as well as the more general children of God.

They say they experience. They say they experience. What I'm going to say for the sake of simplicity, right aside. They do know that it has not been all darkness in the past, though at the present time the way may appear to be gloomy, the outlook, cloudy, to put it mildly.

But what is contained in the word return? Evidence of former visits. Evidence. You don't ask people to return to your house who've never been there before, surely.

There are people you've had as visitors before when you say, I hope you'll return. Isn't that so? Well, that is what I see this word conveys to us this afternoon.

[ 6 : 49 ] Some consolation in a sad condition. There isn't quite that hopelessness of total blackness, total ignorance, death.

There's evidence here of living. Life in the soul sufficiently calls a desire for this gracious benefactor whose love and mercy has been experienced in some way or in the past to return.

We read too, I believe we did, will they not revive us again that thy people may rejoice in thee? You see, there is an awareness here in the appellant, the petitioner, of a blessing attending and attached to the nearness of God.

This has caused many child of God in time past to take up the language of one, be not far from me.

Then, be not silent unto me, lest if thou be silent, I become like those that go down into the pit.

[ 8 : 14 ] Do you not see that there is here combined in this word sadness for present experience but an awareness of a more pleasant past and a desire for a return of those former favours?

Of course, the question may arise, why is the Lord apparently, I said apparently, withdrawn?

Well, we sometimes sing this, Return, O holy dove, return, sweet messenger of rest, I hate the sins that made thee mourn and drove thee from my breast.

There again, they are the feelings of a child of God under exercise and feeling the Lord to be far off. He isn't. That quotation was said to be of the Spirit.

the sweet messenger of rest. He cannot forsake the dwelling place that he has once occupied.

[ 9 : 42 ] It would belie the words of the Lord Jesus. He dwelleth with you and shall be in you. And this spirit of truth that he said he would ask the Father to send in his name, he said he shall abide with you forever.

Well, then you may say, how is it that we're pleading for his return? I hope, before I sit down, that I may look at this in a personal way for just a minute or two.

But I feel that I ought to be chiefly concerned concerned in its widest sense, in viewing the word in its widest sense. The spirit has not forsaken Zion.

The sins which he sees and the shortcomings and inconsistencies he will reprove. I wouldn't say that he hasn't been silent.

But I do not feel that he has altogether withdrawn. I believe there are evidences even today that here and there he chooses to reveal in this church and that church and among that people that he's still there.

[ 11 : 05 ] But you see, there is, in the word of God, mention of a day of small things.

It doesn't say they're wrong things. That's a mercy. Small things can still write things. And of course, there is this aspect of it too which frequently is revealed to me.

I hope it's correct. the outward manifestation of the work and power of the spirit was at its highest in manifestation in times of very solemn experience for the people of God.

The deeper the trial and especially the persecution the greater the favor and the higher the blessings and the more numerous the blessings. But we live in days of comparative comfort when compared with them.

We have no fear that a post of soldiers will be waiting for us when we leave this building to hail us to prison and to death. It has been the case and believe me the spirit's work was very manifest among them.

[ 12 : 30 ] But today what is it for us? times of trial and inward exercise times as we sing the tempest power to prove times of affliction and weakness of the body which I believe some of those dear people didn't experience much of.

They were cast in a stronger mold than some of us are believe me. we know what it is to have to journey on in weakness and frailty.

But here and there the Lord sees fit to grant a visit even to such. Would any dare to say this afternoon that they never heard his voice never felt the sweet influence of his power never known what it was to enjoy his presence in the sanctuary never found the world words sweet to their taste?

Well for these crumbs of mercy in the days in which we live I believe they are appropriately suited to our present needs.

but you will say to me you haven't explained why we're so diminished in number I can't explain why we're so diminished in number except to say this the Lord Jesus who knew everything gave utterance to this and why you may ask yourselves why the Lord Jesus put it like this where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them I said to a friend of mine on one occasion who was very cast down on account of these very things the low state of Zion I said look you and I have reason to weep if the Lord had said I'll come when the place is full we should be in a low state if the

[ 14 : 54 ] Lord had said that he knew just how things were going to be toward the end you know ah this suddenly comes in too some disciples said to him once are there few that be saved are there few what did the Lord say never satisfies anybody's curiosity this is what he said strive to enter in at the straight gate for many I say unto you shall seek to enter and shall not be able yet it's quite right to say return in thy power in the worship of the sanctuaries why now that's an important question why is this desire why do you and

I wish the place was full why do you and I wish we got more companions traveling with us in this wilderness journey we're looking at why is it for our own edification and gratification largely isn't it now if we could we desire to say because we desire the Lord's name to be honored and magnified that would be very different so you see we need to know why we desire the Lord to return I'm going to put it like this this afternoon this petition which seems needful suitable seasonable will be a correct prayer a right desire if we can truly say return increase

Zion for the glory of thy name and the worship of thy dear son and the salvation of poor sinners that would be very different wouldn't it that would be a right desire I wish it was more exercised more frequently felt by us now I've spoken of course speedily on this first word in relation to Zion at large this of course comes then to this body this body do we not desire in this case and many others that the Lord would return to it again for what reason we do need to examine ourselves and their desires and their wishes to see why we ask for these things

I received a serious check during the past week this word was suddenly brought to my notice ye ask and receive not cause ye ask amiss my friends I had to fall under that that's very serious wrong motives desires that are right for wrong purposes how we need to examine ourselves carefully in that which we ask why we ask yet we have here this afternoon return we beseech thee O God of hope among other things visit this vine well I hope to note before I sit down if helped how the

Lord can visit this vine and if he does what will be the result of his visits and this will apply of course as I seek to trace this out concerning you here to all the other causes of truth we have in mind and are concerned about and for Zion at large it won't exclude any who fear God will it I want to pass on to the next three words I think I should take it through steadily if I can we beseech thee this causes some more examination when did you and I beseech the Lord last we may say this morning I hope so yes I do I hope so it's possible to have made a very formal request to then any beseech you in it no earnestness no real desire a clear formal expression of what is called conscience easing duty performed and one satisfied with it

[ 20 : 49 ] I don't want to be harsh I know what goes on inside of me I wish it did now the point is this when the matter is urgent whatever it is and we go before the Lord God as needy people seeking for him to undertake for us in some matter we shall beseech you that means pray earnestly it means let the feelings of my heart go with the words I say that's what beseeching means it means real earnest intercession unto the God of heaven the Lord grant us this not so long ago in prayer I had this come suddenly to me and I tell you these things do shape one up severely especially when one is engaged in public prayer and is expected to continue prayer indicted by the

Lord the Lord will surely hear that made me wonder what was happening to mine whether my poor prayer was being indicted or not but yet you see if we are really concerned about the things we're desiring of God because we feel the necessity of them we shall beseech you and I believe you will hear there are enough words of encouragement in the word of God and in particular at this time in the prophecy of Isaiah to assure us that when the Lord hears he will answer thee he'll do it very graciously to thee and with thee that's promised when we're in earnest and in real need of him we beseech thee who necessary to take particular notice of who this is

O God of hosts you may say what do you understand from this description this expression there's so many expressions of and concerning God in the scriptures why this particular one and look how it's repeated in the psalm O Lord of hosts or O God of hosts and in one case O Lord God of hosts isn't he of course he is he's the Lord of all the heavenly hosts they're all under his mighty control all under his hand and go at his bidding and the hosts of earth largely unknown to them also under his control he's also their Lord and must go at his bidding or be found subservient to his direction unconsciously perhaps but nonetheless controlled as the word which says hither should they're going no further here shall thy prayer waves be stayed that's in the hands of the

Lord God of hosts what does this particular description then do for us as we come to him pleading for his return a return of his favor a return of his love and of his power and beseeching him the God of hosts well it means that great one that mighty God of Israel that gracious and great deliverer that powerful upholder that wonderful person who described himself as I am the God of Abraham the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob this is my memorial and this is my name forever we may say then in passing from this particular clause

O God of hosts it will be our mercy if this is true this God this great wonder working all powerful all wise yet loving gracious merciful God is our God he will be our guide even unto death this is the great God of hosts now a particular plea only short what a mercy if the Lord will hear it this afternoon on the behalf of you people here because of course today you are my particular interest if I am his servant I put an if in but you are my particular interest today if I am his servant if it is your welfare I am supposed to seek and speak for look down from heaven why is this important because of the people to whom he looks in mercy that's how you want him to look isn't it not in anger not in his wrath not in displeasure not to punish no you want to come under this scripture

[ 26 : 51 ] I feel sure the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open unto their cry if you went to hope in his mercy if you didn't feel that he was going to be gracious towards you you wouldn't dare to ask him to look down from heaven solemn thing to ask him to look down upon a poor sinner unprotected by the saviour very solemn so there's a lot of encouragement much blessing and privilege in this request look down from heaven because you have that inward persuasion that in the name and through the person and the sacrifice the atonement the intercession of the mediator he will look down in mercy upon you that's it isn't it

I say again you wouldn't dare to ask him to look upon you look down from heaven unless you had a hope that he would look graciously terrible thing to come face to face with no protection with the holy God of Israel people have found that in the past I believe they still will in the future find what a solemn thing it is for God to look upon them out of Christ to be seen by him in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ is the desire expressed by the apostle in his epistle to the Corinthians in the face of Jesus Christ look down from heaven in thy mercy and thy wisdom and thy entire comprehension and knowledge of their present condition look down and behold see the state we are in note exactly where we are

I don't know how you feel about this word behold it always seems to indicate to me something far different than a passing look or just a glance a casual look no to behold seems to me to look and carefully notice to behold and carefully look into carefully subject the matter to a close inspection behold it and that's what is desired here may I ask this in all affection do you feel as a people here that you cannot feel to God to look down from heaven and behold you in your present condition it's great mercy if you can lay yourselves open to the inspection of the

God of heaven and feel that you may with freedom ease of mind indeed with access approach him and seek that he will look upon you discover your needs and having discovered them graciously grant them look down from heaven and behold there's a reference in the margin to Isaiah 63 where it is brought before the Lord that we're still thy people there's a request there to look down from heaven and when he looks to have regard to the need of his poor people and to arise for their help look down and behold there are in the word of God enough scriptures to assure us that nothing escapes his views hinted this morning and we read in one place the eyes of the

Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good but I'm sure that this is a request from a very different point of view and from very different need there is a feeling of a need of reviving and I do believe that in the final the plea return we beseech the old God hosts is for renewing and reviving and replenishing and I believe you will agree that you would like to see the Lord's hand here in that respect doing these same great things for you and so in this light and for these reasons you would join with this armist look down from heaven and behold and visit this vine visit now I have to candidly confess that I know nothing of the culture of vines or the treatment of them to any great extent only by reading not by practical experience but I do know of course that the owner of the vineyard plants them this is encouraging very encouraging this means to say that each real vine is of the Lord's planting and it is therefore his handiwork the next thing is then in connection with this will he neglect that which he has planted no he certainly will not why then the need for this petition to be made visit this vine well because in the culture of vines certain things are necessary at different times of the year or there will be no fruit which is what is expected of the vine

[ 33 : 56 ] I understand of course that the vine as of itself produces if it's healthy not sure in growth the great majority of which is no help to fruit it consequently there's a tremendous amount that's removed I believe one would need to have a very gracious knowledge of what was needed in the matter of removing any superfluity before one asked the Lord to visit the vine if one is conscious of a need of purging pruning removing that which is untruthful or superfluous well it would be in order to ask him to visit and do that which was necessary

I'm passing now for the moment in my thoughts to the 15th of John where Jesus said I am the vine and ye are the branches and so on and leads you into this particular figure then he says that the branch that doesn't bear fruit his father removes and that branch that bears fruit he purges it that it may bring forth more fruit so now you see what's going to happen don't you if the Lord visits this vine perhaps he has who's to say he hasn't and when the pruning does take place there will be much that's lost and it may be that we might be left to say well practically all that I can see left now looks as dead as can be bare and barren well

I believe that's how some of these poor people feel just before they're to yield fruit to his honour and glory stripped out clearly purged he purges it that's a word to remember he does it he bringeth love before he lifts up in every case he could it to make a lie but in any case to keep to the finger as far as possible presently you will see why the petition is I intended to start this way but I live to prove that it's mine to plan and not to do I've only just reached it this is a topical request in the sense that it's entirely seasonable we've just come through winter naturally literally it's now it's time and that's exactly what is contained in this verse return look down from heaven and behold and visit this vine and grant a springtime may there be evidence of life again in what seemed dead before do you sing sometimes

I expect you do Lord my winter has been long chill my hopes and stop my song afford a spring to me in the text this afternoon in a special sense visit this vine look upon it behold it see what it needs and then in thy mercy do it for them he purges it but it hasn't been my experience in another branch of fruit growing altogether to discover the truth of the words of Jesus that fruit bearing branches reach a certain time when they're removed too ah but it isn't to be burned no it's to go up higher we're in a very gracious sense they should bring forth more fruit the word of God you will find is our present application and future intention in so many cases and we do well to look at the words of God in that respect from that point of view they contain present information and instruction for future fruitfulness and to be fully fulfilled in the future visit this vine well there's one other thing that

I believe is done to it or at least by a well informed and able grower it will be nourished yes it will be nourished it will need that which will cause it to be fruitful and then when it begins to bear fruit it will need that which will perfect it mature it bring it to maturity and perfection therefore it is well within the bounds of propriety to entreat the Lord visit this vine nourish it in the means of grace by the means thou hast thyself appointed so that it should be found fruitful here it is my father glorified says the Lord in that chapter that ye bring bear much fruit so so in this way shall ye be my disciples so you see it's a desire finally ah it's the right desire that I hinted at earlier on isn't it bringing forth fruit to the honor and glory of the owner the master of the vineyard then the whole desire will be correct in order suitable

[ 40 : 47 ] God honoring return we beseech thee O God of hosts look down from heaven and behold and visit this vine so that there should be the fruit of the lips frequently in this house that is giving praise to his name glorifying his name seeking to exhort it and praising for the wonders of his grace and then of course as I promised if helped I would come to the personal aspect of the matter and in this case we may well ask ourselves how is it with us personally individually are we bearing fruit as we feel we should as though that in our lives which is of glory to God you and

I may look in vain for it but there is this much to be said and it's a simple thing to say there isn't a vine that's been planted yet literally that was any way aware of what fruit it was bearing and the master saw it and the master gathered it or had it gathered of course he gathers by proxy in many cases but he saw the fruit he had the benefit of it whether it was traded or otherwise consequently the vine is simply to be in his hands and perform his will and bear such fruit as you may to his glory but yet I'm sure you will feel at times an awareness much to this superfluous and therefore knowing this you will be bold to say look down from heaven and behold and visit this vine and do what they see is to be needful for it well I sometimes come into contact with that hymn which says smile me into fruit or chai if no milder means will do have you been there seen the need of more strong action gentlemen's don't seem to be sufficient sometimes when you feel to be very far off do they there seems to be a need of something really done for you well my mind goes back to a little subject we discussed with our friend in the interval that is to say that when one asks for grace and faith one may find like the poor hymn writer did that the

Lord answers in a most surprising way I've known what it is to lie afflicted in hospital and feeling very low and for this to be made very good to me tis in this way the Lord replied I answer prayer for grace and faith oh but my friends what a way it is it caused the poor recipient to say will thou pursue thy worm to death I really thought he would so I had to pray this I have asked thee for grace and faith grant me strength to bear the way they dost answer and I still feel the necessity of this when the Lord proves when he takes away the superfluous will it to prove as we read in the Hebrews now no chastening for the present seeming to be joyous but grievous but does that nevertheless afterwards how I wish I had some indication that this was occurring afterward it yielded the peaceable fruits of righteousness like divineness being properly tended to properly purged pruned properly nourished it yields good fruit the Lord had mercy upon us in our felt barrenness and in his mercy return to us and visit our vines amen