

Exposition on Psalm 85

by St. Augustine

The sermon is an exposition of Psalm 85, which prophesies of Christ's salvation and speaks of the future as if it were already done.

Scripture: Psalm 84:1-2, Psalm 84:4-6, Psalm 84:8-12, Psalm 85:2, John 14:6, Romans 10:4

Topics: "Spiritual Freedom", "Divine Mercy"

Description

St. Augustine preaches on the Psalms, emphasizing the significance of Christ as the end of the law and the Truth and Way to which believers should fix their gaze. He delves into the prophetic nature of the Psalms, highlighting the spiritual freedom Christ brings by turning away captivity through forgiveness of sins. The sermon explores the themes of confession, righteousness, and the divine mercy that leads to peace and salvation. St. Augustine encourages believers to turn their hearts to God, seek righteousness through confession, and allow God to bring forth sweetness and increase in their lives.

Transcript

1. ...Its title is, A Psalm for the end, to the sons of Core. Let us understand no other end than that of which the Apostle speaks: for, Christ is the end of the law. Romans 10:4 Therefore when at the head of the title of the Psalm he placed the words, for the end, he directed our heart to Christ. If we fix our gaze on Him, we shall not stray: for He is Himself the Truth unto which we are eager to arrive, and He Himself the Way John 14:6 by which we run....

2. The Prophet sings to Him of the future, and uses words as it were of past time: he speaks of things future as if already done, because with God that which is future has already taken place....Lord, You have been favourable unto Your land Psalm 84:1; as if He had already done so. You have turned away the captivity of Jacob. His ancient people of Jacob, the people of Israel, born of Abraham's seed, in the promise to become one day the heir of God. That was indeed a real people, to whom the Old Testament was given; but in the Old Testament the New was figured: that was the figure, this the truth expressed. In that figure, by a kind of foretelling of the future, there was given to that people a certain land of promise, in a region where the people of the Jews abode; where also is the city of Jerusalem, whose name we have all heard of. When this people had received possession of this land, they suffered many troubles from their neighbouring enemies who surrounded them: and when they sinned against their God, they were given into captivity, not for destruction, but for discipline; their Father not condemning, but scourging them. And after being seized on, they were set free, and many times were both made captives, and set free; and they

are now in captivity, and that for a great sin, even because they crucified their Lord. What then are we to understand them to mean by the words, You have turned away the captivity of Jacob?...This Psalm has prophesied in song. You have turned away the captivity of Jacob. To whom did it speak? To Christ; for it said, for the end, for the sons of Core: for He has turned away the captivity of Jacob. Hear Paul himself confessing: O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? He asked who it should be, and straightway it occurred to him, The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 7:24-25 Of this grace of God the Prophet speaks to our Lord Jesus Christ, You have turned away the captivity of Jacob. Attend to the captivity of Jacob, attend, and see that it is this: You have turned away our captivity, not by setting us free from the barbarians, with whom we had not met, but by setting us free from bad works, from our sins, by which Satan held sway over us. For if any one has been set free from his sins, the prince of sinners has not whence he may hold sway over him.

3. For how did He turn away the captivity of Jacob? See, how that that setting free is spiritual, see how that it is done inwardly. You have forgiven, he says, the iniquity of Your people: You have covered all their sins Psalm 84:2. Behold how He has turned away their captivity, in that He has remitted iniquity: iniquity held them captive; your iniquity forgiven, you are freed. Confess therefore that you are in captivity, that you may be worthy to be freed: for he that knows not of his enemy, how can he invoke the liberator? You have covered all their sins. What is, You have covered? So as not to see them. How did You not see them? So as not to take vengeance on them. You were unwilling to see our sins: and therefore You saw them not, because You would not see them: You have covered all their sins. You have appeased all Your anger: You have turned Yourself from Your wrathful indignation Psalm 84:3.

4. And as these things are said of the future, though the sound of the words is past, it follows: Turn us, O God of our salvation Psalm 84:4. That which he had just related as if it were done, how prays he that it may be done, except because he wished to show that he had spoken as if of the past in prophecy? But that it was not yet done which he had said was done he shows by this, that he prays that it may be done: Turn us, O God of our salvation, and turn away Your anger from us. Did you not say before: You have appeased all Your anger, You have turned Yourself from Your wrathful indignation? How then now do you say, And turn away Your anger from us? The Prophet answers: These things I speak of as done, because I see them about to be done: but because they are not yet done, I pray that they may come, which I have already seen.

5. Be not angry with us for ever Psalm 84:5. For by the anger of God we are subject to death, and by the anger of God we eat bread on this earth in want, and in the sweat of our face. Genesis 3:19 This was Adam's sentence when he sinned: and that Adam was every one of us, for in Adam all die; 1 Corinthians 15:22 the sentence passed on him has taken effect after him on us. For we were not yet ourselves, but we were in Adam: therefore whatever happened to Adam himself took effect on us also, so that we should die: for we all were in him....So far as this the sin of your father hurts you not, if you have changed yourself, even as it would not hurt your father if he had changed himself. But that which our stock has received unto its subjection to death, it has derived from Adam. What has it so derived? That frailty of the flesh, this torture of pains, this house of poverty, this chain of death, and snares of temptations; all these things we carry about in this flesh; and this is the anger of God, because it is the vengeance of God. But because it was so to be, that we should be regenerated, and by believing should be made new, and all that mortality was to be removed in our resurrection, and the whole man was to be restored in newness; For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive; 1 Corinthians 15:22 seeing this the Prophet says, Be not angry with us for ever, nor stretch out Your wrath from one generation to another.

The first generation was mortal by Your wrath: the second generation shall be immortal by Your mercy....

6. O God, You shall turn us again, and make us alive Psalm 84:6. Not as if we ourselves of our own accord, without Your mercy, turn unto You, and then You shall make us alive: but so that not only our being made alive is from You, but our very conversion, that we may be made alive. And Your people shall rejoice in You. To their own evil they shall rejoice in themselves: to their own good they shall rejoice in You. For when they wished to have joy of themselves, they found in themselves woe: but now because God is all our joy, he that will rejoice securely, let him rejoice in Him who cannot perish.

For why, my brethren, will you rejoice in silver? Either your silver perishes, or thou: and no one knows which first: yet this is certain, that both shall perish; which first, is uncertain. For neither can man remain here always, nor can silver remain here always: so too gold, so garments, so houses, so money, so broad lands, so, lastly, this light itself. Be not thou willing then to rejoice in these: but rejoice in that light which has no setting: rejoice in that dawn which no yesterday precedes, which no tomorrow follows.

What light is that? I, says He, am the Light of the world. John 8:12 He who says unto you, I am the Light of the world, calls you to Himself. When He calls you, He converts you: when He converts you, He heals you: when He has healed you, you shall see your Converter, unto whom it is said, Show us Your mercy, O Lord, and grant us Your salvation Psalm 84:7: Your salvation, that is, Your Christ. Happy is he unto whom God shows His mercy. He it is who cannot indulge in pride, unto whom God shows His mercy.

For by showing him His salvation He persuades him that whatever good man has, he has not but from Him who is all our good. And when a man has seen that whatever good he has he has not from himself, but from his God; he sees that everything which is praised in him is of the mercy of God, not of his own deserving; and seeing this, he is not proud; not being proud, he is not lifted up; not lifting himself up, he falls not; not falling, he stands; standing, he clings fast; clinging fast, he abides; abiding, he enjoys, and rejoices in the Lord his God.

He who made him shall be unto him a delight: and his delight no one spoils, no one interrupts, no one takes away....Therefore, what says John in his Epistle? Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be. 1 John 3:2 Who would not rejoice, if suddenly while he was wandering abroad, ignorant of his descent, suffering want, and in a state of misery and toil, it were announced, You are the son of a senator: your father enjoys an ample patrimony on your family estate; I bid you return to your father: how would he rejoice, if this were said to him by some one whose promise he could trust?

One whom we can trust, an Apostle of Christ, has come and said to us, You have a father, you have a country, you have an inheritance. Who is that father? Beloved, we are the sons of God. 1 John 3:2 ...Therefore He promised us to show Himself unto us. Think, my brethren, what His beauty is. All those beautiful things which you see, which you love, He made. If these are beautiful, what is He Himself? If these are great, how great is He? Therefore from these things which we love here, let us the more long for Him: and despising these things, let us love Him: that by that very love we may by faith purify our hearts, and His vision, when it comes, may find our heart purified.

The light which shall be shown unto us ought to find us whole: this is the work of faith now. This is what we have spoken here: And grant us Your salvation: grant us Your Christ, that we may know Your Christ, see Your Christ; not as the Jews saw Him and crucified Him, but as the Angels see Him, and rejoice.

7. I will hearken Psalm 84:8. The Prophet spoke: God spoke within in him, and the world made a noise without. Therefore, retiring for a little from the noise of the world, and turning himself back upon himself, and from himself upon Him whose voice he heard within; sealing up his ears, as it were, against the tumultuous disquietude of this life, and against the soul weighed down by the corruptible body, and against the imagination, that through the earthly tabernacle pressing down, thinks on many things, Wisdom 9:15 he says, I will hearken what the Lord God speaks in me; and he heard, what?

For He shall speak peace unto His people. The voice of Christ, then, the voice of God, is peace: it calls unto peace. Ho! It says, whosoever are not yet in peace, love ye peace: for what can you find better from Me than peace? What is peace? Where there is no war. What is this, where there is no war? Where there is no contradiction, where there is no resistance, nothing to oppose. Consider if we are yet there: consider if there is not now a conflict with the devil, if all the saints and faithful ones wrestle not with the prince of demons.

And how do they wrestle with him whom they see not? They wrestle with their own desires, by which he suggests unto them sins: and by not consenting to what he suggests, though they are not conquered, yet they fight. Therefore there is not yet peace where there is fighting....Whatever we provide for our refreshment, there again we find weariness. Are you hungry? One asks you: you answer I am. He places food before you for your refreshment; continue thou to use it, for you had need of it; yet in continuing that which you need for refreshment, therein do you find weariness.

By long sitting you were tired; you rise and refreshest yourself by walking; continue that relief, and by much walking you are wearied; again you would sit down. Find me anything by which you are refreshed, wherein if you continue thou dost not again become weary. What peace then is that which men have here, opposed by so many troubles, desires, wants, wearinesses? This is no true, no perfect peace. What will be perfect peace? This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 1 Corinthians 15:53 ...Persevere in eating much; this itself will kill you: persevere in fasting much, by this you will die: sit continually, being resolved not to rise up, by this you will die: be always walking so as never to take rest, by this you will die; watch continually, taking no sleep, by this you will die; sleep continually, never watching, thus too you will die.

When therefore death shall be swallowed up in victory, these things shall no longer be: there will be full and eternal peace. We shall be in a City, of which, brethren, when I speak I find it hard to leave off, especially when offenses wax common. Who would not long for that City whence no friend goes out, whither no enemy enters, where is no tempter, no seditious person, no one dividing God's people, no one wearying the Church in the service of the devil; since the prince himself of all such is cast into eternal fire, and with him those who consent unto him, and who have no will to retire from him?

There shall be peace made pure in the sons of God, all loving one another, seeing one another full of God, since God shall be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:28 We shall have God as our common object of vision, God as our common possession, God as our common peace. For whatever there is which He now gives unto us, He Himself shall be unto us instead of His gifts; this will be full and perfect peace. This He speaks unto His people: this it was which he would hearken unto who said, I will hearken what the Lord God will say unto me: for He shall speak peace unto His people, and to His saints, and unto those who turn their hearts unto Him.

Lo, my brethren, do ye wish that unto you should belong that peace which God utters? Turn your heart unto Him: not unto me, or unto that one, or unto any man. For whatever man would turn unto himself the hearts of men, he falls with them. Which is better, that you fall with him unto whom you turn yourself, or that thou stand with Him with whom you turn yourself? Our joy, our peace, our rest, the end of all troubles, is none but God: blessed are they that turn their hearts unto Him.

8. Nevertheless, His salvation is near them that fear Him Psalm 84:9. There were some even then who feared Him in the Jewish people. Everywhere throughout the earth idols were worshipped: devils were feared, not God: in that nation God was feared. But why was He feared? In the Old Testament He was feared, lest He should give them up to captivity, lest He should take away their land from them, lest He should destroy their vines with hail, lest He should make their wives barren, lest He should take away their children from them.

For these carnal promises of God captivated their minds, which as yet were of small growth, and for these things God was feared: but He was near unto them who even for these things feared Him. The Pagan prayed for land to the devil: the Jew prayed for land to God: it was the same thing which they prayed for, but not the same to whom they prayed. The latter, though seeking what the Pagan sought, yet was distinguished from the Pagan; for he sought it of Him who had made all things.

And God, who was far from the Gentiles, was near unto them: yet He had regard even to those who were afar off, and to those who were near, as the Apostle said: And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to them that were near. Ephesians 2:17 Whom did He mean by those near? The Jews, because they worshipped one God. Whom by those who were afar off? The Gentiles, because they had left Him by whom they were made and worshipped things which themselves had made.

For it is not in space that any one is far from God, but in affections. You love God, you are near unto Him. You hate God, you are far off. You are standing in the same place, both while you are near and far off. This it was, my brethren, which the Prophet had regard to: although he saw the mercy of God extending over all, yet he saw something special and peculiar shown toward the Jews, and he says, Nevertheless, I will hearken what the Lord God shall say unto me: for He shall speak peace unto His people; and His people shall be, not Judaea only, but it shall be gathered together out of all nations: For He shall speak peace unto His Saints, and to those who turn their hearts unto Him, and to all who shall turn their hearts unto Him from the whole world.

Nevertheless, His salvation shall be near them that fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land: that is, in that land in which the Prophet was born, greater glory shall dwell, because Christ began to be preached from thence. Thence were the Apostles, and there first they were sent; from thence were the Prophets, there first was the Temple, there sacrifice was made to God, there were the Patriarchs, there He Himself came of the seed of Abraham, there Christ was manifested, there Christ appeared; for from thence was the Virgin Mary who bore Christ.

There He walked with His feet, there He worked miracles. Thirdly, He ascribed so great honour to that nation, that when a certain Canaanitish woman interrupted Him, praying for the healing of her daughter, He said unto her, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Matthew 15:24 Seeing this, the Prophet says, that glory may dwell in our land.

9. Mercy and truth have met together Psalm 84:10. Truth in our land, in a Jewish person, mercy in the land of the Gentiles. For where was truth? Where the utterances of God were. Where was mercy? On those

who had left their God, and turned themselves unto devils. Did He look down also upon them? Yea, as if He said, Call those who are fugitives afar off, who have departed far from Me: call them, let them find Me who seek them, since they themselves would not seek Me. Therefore, Mercy and truth have met together: righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Do righteousness, and you shall have peace; that righteousness and peace may kiss each other. For if you love not righteousness, you shall not have peace; for those two, righteousness and peace, love one another, and kiss one another: that he who has done righteousness may find peace kissing righteousness. They two are friends: thou perhaps wilt love the one, and not the other: for there is no one who wills not peace: but all will not work righteousness. Ask all men, Willest thou peace? With one mouth the whole race of man answers you, I wish, I desire, I will, I love it. Love also righteousness: for these two, righteousness and peace, are friends; they kiss one another: if you love not the friend of peace, peace itself will not love you, nor come unto you. For what great thing is it to desire peace? Every bad man longs for peace. For peace is a good thing. But do righteousness, for righteousness and peace kiss one another, they quarrel not together....

10. Truth has sprung out of the earth, and righteousness has looked down from heaven Psalm 84:11. Truth has sprung out of the earth: Christ is born of a woman. The Son of God has come forth of the flesh. What is truth? The Son of God. What is the earth? Flesh. Ask whence Christ was born, and you see that Truth is sprung out of the earth. But the Truth which sprang out of the earth was before the earth, and by It the heaven and the earth were made: but in order that righteousness might look down from heaven, that is, in order that men might be justified by Divine grace, Truth was born of the Virgin Mary; that He might be able to offer a sacrifice to justify them, the sacrifice of suffering, the sacrifice of the Cross. And how could He offer a sacrifice for our sins, except He died? How could He die, except He received from us that wherein He might die; that is, unless He received from us mortal flesh, Christ could not have died: because the Word of God dies not, Godhead dies not, the Virtue and Wisdom of God does not die. How should He offer a sacrifice, a healing victim, if He died not? How should He die, unless He clothed Himself with flesh? How should He put on flesh, except truth sprang out of the earth?

11. On the same passage we may mention another meaning. Truth is sprung out of the earth: confession from man. For thou, O man, wast a sinner. O earth, who when you had sinned heard the sentence, Earth you are, and unto earth shall you return, Genesis 3:19 from you let truth spring, that righteousness may look down from heaven. How does truth spring from you, while you are a sinner, while you are unrighteous? Confess your sins, and truth shall spring out of you. For if while you are unrighteous, you call yourself just, how can truth spring out of you? But if being unrighteous thou dost confess yourself to be so, truth has sprung out of the earth....What righteousness has looked down from heaven? It is that of God, as though He said: Let us spare this man, for he spares not himself: let us pardon him, for he himself confesses. He is changed so as to punish his sin: I too will change, so as to set him free.

12. For the Lord shall give sweetness, and our land shall give her increase Psalm 84:12....He will give unto you the sweetness of working righteousness, so that righteousness shall begin to delight you, whom before unrighteousness delighted: so that thou who at first delighted in drunkenness, shall rejoice in sobriety: and thou who at first rejoiced in theft, so as to take from another man what you had not, shall seek to give to him that has not that which you have: and thou who took delight in robbing, shall delight now in giving: thou whom shows delighted, shall delight in prayer; thou who delighted in trifling and lascivious songs, shall now delight in singing hymns to God; in running to church, thou who at first ran to the theatre. Whence is that sweetness born to you, except from this, that God gives sweetness? For, behold, you see what I mean: behold, I have spoken unto you the word of God, I have sown seed in your

devout hearts, finding your souls furrowed, as it were, with the plough of confession: with devout attention you have received the seed; think now upon the word which you have heard, like those who break up the clouds, lest the fowls should carry away the seed, that what is sown may be able to spring up there: and unless God rain upon it, what profits it that it is sown? This is what is meant by our land shall give her increase. May He with His visitations, in leisure, in business, in your house, in your bed, at meal-time, in conversation, in walks, visit your hearts, when we are not by. May the rain of God come and make to sprout what is sown there: and when we are not by, and are resting quietly, or otherwise employed, may God give increase to the seeds which we have sown, that remarking afterwards your improved characters, we too may rejoice for your fruit.

13. For righteousness shall go before him, and he shall direct his steps in the way Psalm 84:14: that righteousness, namely, which consists in confession of sins: for this is truth itself. For you ought to be righteous towards yourself, and to punish yourself: for this is the beginning of man's righteousness, that you should punish yourself, who art evil, and God should make you good. Therefore since this is the beginning of man's righteousness, this becomes a way for God, that God may come unto you: there make for Him a way, in confession of sins. Therefore John too, when he was baptizing in the water of repentance, and would have men come to him repenting of their former deeds, spoke thus: Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. You pleased yourself in your sins, O man: let that which you were displease you, that you may be able to become what you were not. Prepare the way of the Lord: let that righteousness go before, of confession of sins: He will come and visit you, for now He has where to place His steps, He has whereby He may come to you. Before you confessed your sins, you had shut up the way of God: there was no way by which He might come unto you. Confess your past life, and you open a way; and Christ shall come unto you, and shall place His steps in the way, that He may guide you with His own footsteps.

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