

Grace & Gladness Glorifies God
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Bible Text: Psalm 86:1-17
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Turn now if you would in your Bibles to the book of Psalms and to the 86th Psalm. You will notice that part of the title of this psalm is “A prayer of David”¹ This is a psalm written by David, a psalm written by David in the midst of some difficulties that he encountered. The Psalm divides in three parts. Verses 1-7 find their center in verse four and particularly the words, “Make glad the soul of Your servant.”² Verses 14-17 form the end of the Psalm and center on verse 16 with the words, “Turn to me, and be gracious to me.”³ The center of the Psalm, verses 8-13, swings around verse 11, “Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.”⁴

And so we read Psalm 86:

Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me;
For I am afflicted and needy.
Preserve my soul, for I am a godly man;
O You my God, save Your servant who trusts in You.
Be gracious to me, O Lord,
For to You I cry all day long.
Make glad the soul of Your servant,
For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive,
And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.
Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
And give heed to the voice of my supplications!
In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You,
For You will answer me.

There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord,
Nor are there any works like Yours.
All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O
Lord,

¹ Psalm 86:1.

² Psalm 86:4.

³ Psalm 86:16.

⁴ Psalm 86:11.

And they shall glorify Your name.
For You are great and do wondrous deeds;
You alone are God.
Teach me Your way, O LORD;
I will walk in Your truth;
Unite my heart to fear Your name.
I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
And will glorify Your name forever.
For Your lovingkindness toward me is great,
And You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.
O God, arrogant men have risen up against me,
And a band of violent men have sought my life,
And they have not set You before them.
But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.
Turn to me, and be gracious to me;
Oh grant Your strength to Your servant,
And save the son of Your handmaid.
Show me a sign for good,
That those who hate me may see it and be ashamed,
Because You, O LORD, have helped me and comforted me.⁵

May God be pleased to bless to us this his Word. Amen.

Let's pray together.

Father, again, thank you for your grace that comes to us in Christ. Thank you that as we take time to seek you in and through your Word, using this means of grace, that you are pleased to come to us in grace and gladness that glorifies you. And we pray that as we look into this piece of your Word this morning that this would, indeed, be the case. That that grace and gladness that glorifies you might pervade our lives and we might live to your glory. Bless us we pray in this way we ask in the good name of Jesus Christ who is the Lord of glory. Amen.

Well, the euphoria of the holidays is past. The time of opening the packages is a memory which is fading. The family gatherings, likewise, and the times of getting together around the table and enjoying one another and enjoying the feast of the holidays, all of these are past. And here we are in the new year slugging it out, as it were, facing that which is before us. And as I have talked with you and talked with others I have gotten this response to greetings.

“How are you?”

“Well, I am coping. I am hanging in there.”

⁵ Psalm 86:1-17.

So it is. And as we cope and as we hang in there and the pressures of life are upon you and me, it can tell on your countenance and it can tell on my countenance. It can tell on your demeanor and my demeanor, how we face the issues of life. And we can get down.

On the other hand the Christian life really ought to be a life in which there is an undergirding joy, in which we have countenances which are not fallen. As we face that which life throws at us and there should be, as I say, an underlying joy which results in a glow and a radiance about life. At least that is what we read in the Bible.

And so we need to pray. You need to pray and I need to pray. We need to pray for that grace and gladness that glorifies God in the midst of the life in which God has placed us. And this is exactly what David is talking about in this psalm this morning. He is praying for the grace and the gladness that glorifies God as he faces some difficult family situations in actuality.

And so, as this is the point of the psalm, this is the point we want to labor on this morning. The point is that you need to seek and I need to seek the grace and the gladness that glorifies God. This is simply the point we have before us. Seek the grace and the gladness that glorifies God.

Our psalm ends with a note of discouragement or at least a note in which David is facing some difficult times. Look at the end of this psalm if you would, verses 14 and 17. “O God,” David says, “Arrogant men have risen up against me, And a band of violent men have sought my life.”⁶

Verse 17. “Show me a sign for good, That those who hate me may see it and be ashamed.”⁷

“Arrogant men have risen up against me, And... violent men have sought my life.”⁸

The arrogant individual might also be the insolent individual. If this is the boss and the boss is a little arrogant, the boss looks down his nose at you. If this is someone who works for you, this individual might be a little insolent and lack respect for those who are above him or her. This is the kind of person David is talking about. The the arrogant individual is also the violent person who is also ruthless. The arrogant person can be ruthless and, as verse 17 says, also show hatred.

David was acquainted with this. It is very likely that this psalm was penned in light of the rebellion led by David’s son Absalom. Absalom, you remember spirited the people away from David. Absalom desired to be the ruler of the kingdom and he declared himself king. He had a hatred in his heart for his own father. And David took his family and took his relatives and took his household out of Jerusalem because he knew that Absalom was a ruthless character. Absalom had already plotted and carried out the plot to kill one

⁶ Psalm 86:14.

⁷ Psalm 86:17.

⁸ Psalm 86:14.

of his own half brothers. David understood the situation and so he left with his family; he fled Jerusalem. And while he was going out of Jerusalem, going up the ascent of the Mount of Olives and going through the little community of Bahurim, close to the Mount of Olives, a fellow by the name of Shimei came out and began to throw rocks at him and curse at him and say, “You man of blood, get out of here.”⁹ And so David was acquainted with men of arrogance and hatred and violence. And he prays to God with regard to these things.

Well, if you were in this sort of a situation or, I can speak for myself in this sort of a situation, you would feel rather afflicted and troubled and in need. And this is exactly the situation with David.

Look now at the beginning of the psalm, at verse one. “Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me; For I am afflicted and needy.”¹⁰ This is not only external affliction that is felt by David, but it is the result of the words, the result of the cursing. You feel the affliction in the heart.

The word “afflicted” also may be translated “poor.” Here David and all of his household are suddenly out of Jerusalem and in need. They are needy or unfortunate. And the word “unfortunate” has a significant ring.

“Providence has gone against me.” David senses things are not good.

And then, if you would, look at verse seven. “In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, For You will answer me.”¹¹ In the day of my trouble. David does feel trouble. One of the dictionaries I looked at said that this word “trouble” could be translated vexed. It used this little comparison. The word trouble refers to the vexation that comes from another woman entering the picture.

I see a couple of you nodding. You can imagine how vexed Sarah was when Hagar gave birth to a child and she was barren. This is the word. Vexed and troubled in heart. And so it was with David. And when there is this trouble of heart and this vexation and this affliction, the countenance often will fall. It can be seen on the face. It can be witnessed in the demeanor.

You think of Cain. God comes to Cain after he had slain his brother Abel and the guilt was upon his own soul. And God comes to him and asks a question, “Why has your countenance fallen?”¹²

Well, you can understand why. This is often the case that when the trouble comes. The countenance *is* fallen. I remember when the fellow who led me to the Lord saw me one

⁹ See 2 Samuel 16:7.

¹⁰ Psalm 86:1.

¹¹ Psalm 86:7.

¹² Genesis 4:6.

day and he looked at me in the eye and he said, “What’s the matter, Denny? Have you lost your joy?”

I thought to myself, well, I don’t think I have lost my joy. I think I know in whom I do believe and I know that God will complete the good work he began in me. But apparently it was showing on my face. It wasn’t a particularly good day and he could see that on my countenance because my countenance was fallen.

And so this is how these things work. Well, this is one side of the coin. Let’s look at another side of the coin and compare the great God of heaven with David who is in affliction. When you compare the man in affliction, the woman in affliction with God you realize there is no one like God.

Look at verse eight. “There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord, Nor are there any works like Yours.”¹³ Of all the idols and all the would be gods, of all the things that attract the attention of men and women and young people and children, there is nothing to be compared with God. All you have to do is look at his works, the works of his hands, the creation that is around us.

In Geneva, Switzerland they are building and hope to put in to operation shortly a particle accelerator. It has a long tunnel. What is it, 16 miles in length, something like that? It is a huge machine. And they want to take sub atomic particles and shoot them down this tunnel toward one another at the speed of light and see what happens. And the scientists are saying, “Oh, we can replicate the big bang. We can replicate what happened at the beginning of the universe.”

My reaction is: Oh, really? Oh, really? You are going to replicate the handiwork of God? I doubt it.

Those sub atomic particles are themselves held together by a power that comes from the hand of God. The scientists want to try and release some of that power. And so even those subatomic particles witness to the greatness of God. There is no one like him.

Verse 13. “Your lovingkindness toward me is great, And You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.”¹⁴

You are not only the creator, but you are the one, no one else, Lord, who has delivered my soul, my life, from the grave. The King James Version puts it, “from hell.” You have delivered me from hell itself and from the punishments of hell because of my sin. You alone, Lord, have done this. This is your greatness.

And then verse two. “Preserve my soul, for I am a godly man.”¹⁵

¹³ Psalm 86:8.

¹⁴ Psalm 86:13.

¹⁵ Psalm 86:2.

You are not only the one who creates and saves from destruction and from hell, you are the one who preserves. Day by day you are the one who preserves me and carries me through this life, Lord. You are the great God of all. And this great God does save.

Let's examine this a little bit from the psalm. Look at verse three. "Be gracious to me, O Lord, For to You I cry all day long."¹⁶ And then verse five. "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You."¹⁷

You are full of grace and compassion and mercy, Lord. You are the great God of all and you are ready to forgive.

I would guess that David is thinking about the situation with his Son Absalom once again. The reason Absalom was raised up in rebellion against David was rooted in David's sin with Bathsheba. It was rooted in David's sin when he tried to cover up the adulterous affair with Bathsheba by murdering Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba. David had been engaged in adultery and murder. He knew this. And he cast himself on the mercy of God and the grace of God. Nathan the prophet said to David, "There is going to be trouble in your household because of your sin, David."¹⁸

David understood that this was the case and he knew that God was ready to forgive as verse five says, "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You."¹⁹

The word "lovingkindness" is covenant love. This is love that is rooted in God's promise to David and God's promise to the likes of you and me through Jesus Christ, his covenant love. And his covenant will not be broken, his covenant of grace. He is the gracious God who is full of lovingkindness.

And then look at verses 15 and 16 in this same light. "But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth."²⁰ Oh, how thankful David must have been that God was slow to anger because of his great sin.

And isn't it true that God is exceedingly patient with you and me? He waits and he gives us time to repent. He gives you time to repent and he gives me time to repent. He gives us time to recognize our faults and our errors and our sins. He is full of mercy and compassion and loving kindness.

And then verse 16. "Turn to me, and be gracious to me; Oh grant Your strength to Your servant."²¹

¹⁶ Psalm 86:3.

¹⁷ Psalm 86:5.

¹⁸ See 2 Samuel 12:11.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Psalm 86:15.

²¹ Psalm 86:16.

Lord, you are the one. You are the creator. You are the redeemer. You are the one who preserves. You are the one who has offered salvation and worked out salvation and brought salvation about. And you are the one who can extricate me from this particular situation in which I find myself. Certainly David was praying in this way.

And did you notice that note on grace? Look at verse 15 and 16 again.

But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth. Turn to me, and be gracious to me.²²

Oh how you need the grace of God and I need the grace of God.

I was asked in class on Friday by one of the students about the love of God. And I responded by asking, “How do you know the love of God?”

Paul says, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”²³ Here is the great demonstration of love. Love is, from God’s perspective not just at that warm fuzzy feeling that you have in your bosom that some have called puppy love. God’s love is demonstrated in the giving of his Son in that sacrifice that covers your sins. This is his lovingkindness, his covenant love. This is the outpouring of his grace.

Paul also says, “The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”²⁴ The work of Christ, the forgiveness, the grace demonstrated by God, is actually applied to your heart inwardly by the Spirit of God. So experientially you say, “Yes, Lord. Your lovingkindness is good. I see your mercy and I know it, even in this trouble in which I find myself now. You are able to deliver me. You can extricate me. Your grace is great.”

And so what should you do and what should I do? You should seek the grace of God. Correct? You should seek the grace of God. And this is exactly what David is telling us.

Look at verse 11 now. “Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.”²⁵ Verse 11 is actually the very center of the psalm. It is like a hinge around which the psalm turns. Everything in the psalm turns around verse 11. “Teach me Your way, O LORD.”²⁶

In Isaiah the prophet says, “Your ways are higher than my ways and your thoughts are higher than my thoughts.”²⁷

²² Psalm 86:15-16.

²³ Romans 5:8.

²⁴ Romans 5:5.

²⁵ Psalm 86:11.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See Isaiah 55:9.

Even the note in the Reformation Study Bible has the explanation of this verse wrong. Notes aren't the infallible Word, you know, the notes in your Bible. It is the Bible text to which you have to pay attention.

What the prophet is saying is that God's thoughts are righteous. God's ways are righteous. And he is rebuking Israel because Israel's ways were evil and Israel's thoughts were evil. And so often this is the case with you and me. There is a great gulf fixed between God's thoughts and our thoughts because he is so holy and righteous. And do you notice what David is saying here? "Teach me Your way, O LORD."²⁸ Teach me the way of righteousness. Teach me the way of truth.

And look at the end of the verse. "Unite my heart to fear Your name."²⁹ David speaks of the name of God. Names usually betray character. This is why parents—and some of you have been engaged in this lately—this is why parents are interested in the names of their children. This is why we get books of names. We want to know the meanings of the various names because we want an appropriate name given to our child that really characterizes who he or she really is. Names and character are connected. And the name of God relates to the character of God. And, again, we have this accent on the holiness and the righteousness and the goodness of God. He is supremely good. And David wants to learn the goodness of God.

"Teach me Your way, O LORD...Unite my heart to fear Your name."³⁰ And the prayer is, "Unite my heart. I don't want a divided heart," says David. "I don't want a heart that is going this way and that way. But I want a heart that is fixed on you. I want a heart united."

The apostle Paul talks about this sort of thing in Romans chapter seven. "That which I would do I cannot."³¹ It is the divide heart.

Unite my heart. Fix my heart on you. "Teach me Your way, O LORD."³² "Fix my heart on you."

And what will happen? Look at verse 11 again. "Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.... I will walk in Your truth."³³

You see, teaching and life are connected. Truly hearing the Word of God, from the Hebrew perspective, is acting on the Word of God. If you don't act on the Word of God you don't actually hear the Word of God. And so being taught the Word of God means living by the Word of God, walking in it, walking in that way. I will walk in God's truth.

²⁸ Psalm 86:11.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Romans 7:15.

³² Psalm 86:11.

³³ Ibid.

And so David seeks the grace of God through the teaching of God. And it comes through his Word.

Now there are some outcomes here that I want you to see. You should seek the grace of God in the teaching of the Word of God because it will make your soul glad.

Verse four. "Make glad the soul of Your servant, For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul."³⁴
Gladness will come.

Let's read verses three, four and five together.

Be gracious to me, O Lord,
For to You I cry all day long.
Make glad the soul of Your servant,
For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive,
And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.³⁵

Do you see how that gladness is sandwiched between verses that talk about the grace of God? When you seek the grace of God, gladness comes. This is the promise, gladness of heart. Those of you who especially were converted later in life know the gladness that came when your sins were forgiven and you knew that you could look to your heavenly Father knowing that he loves you. There was gladness in your heart.

But that is not the end of the story. There is glory to come. Grace and gladness leads to glory. This is what David is teaching us.

Verses 11 and 12.

Teach me Your way, O LORD;
I will walk in Your truth;
Unite my heart to fear Your name.
I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
And will glorify Your name forever.³⁶

Here is what happens. You seek the face of God through his Word. He teaches you. Gladness enters your soul and your very countenance and demeanor changes. And people see it.

The apostle John says, "No one has seen God at any time."³⁷ If you love one another, the love of God abides in you.³⁸ In other words, God is seen through people like you and me

³⁴ Psalm 86:4.

³⁵ Psalm 86:3-5.

³⁶ Psalm 86:11-12.

³⁷ John 1:18; 1 John 4:12.

³⁸ See 1 John 4:12.

graciously loving one another, enjoying one another. It shows on the countenance. God is seen in this way. And not only this, look, if you will, at verse nine.

“All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And they shall glorify Your name.”³⁹

When the grace and gladness of God pervades your soul and your countenance is changed and others observe it, they see the grace of God and they, too, are changed.

I am amazed at congregations like this one. I am amazed at our little seminary community at Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary from this perspective. When you look around this congregation you don't have to look very far to see individuals from other nations. Praise God. The witness and testimony goes forward to every tribe and tongue and people and nation across the face of the earth. And part of the way that this happens is through the grace and gladness that glorifies God in the lives of people like you and me. So seek, seek the grace and gladness that glorifies God. This is the lesson of the psalm.

Several years ago when we got out of the army, I got a job at Travelers Insurance Company, not as a salesman, as an engineer. I wouldn't have made it as a salesman. As an engineer it was OK. I worked up to the place, in a little office in Dallas, Texas, that I was training other engineers. During that time we knew the Lord had other things for us. And we sought the Lord with regard to future ministry. In God's providence we moved from Dallas, Texas to Bartlesville, Oklahoma, a little town in northeast Oklahoma, the home of Philips Petroleum Company. And I was a pastor there.

Then in God's providence we entered a very dark period in that pastorate involving church discipline and church trials. I was broken. One day in the mail I received a letter from the wife of a man that I trained as an engineer in Dallas, Texas. And this wife said to me, “My husband just came to Christ and we attribute this in large measure to your life and demeanor and work in that engineering office in Dallas, Texas.”

I was emotional anyway because of the situation in which we found ourselves in the church and I broke down and cried. My response was, “Thank you, Lord.” The grace and gladness that glorifies God had been present in my life. And I am not any different than any of you are, folks. I am not any different than any of you are. I was working in a little engineering office in a firm in downtown Dallas. Some of you are working in different circumstances today but not substantially different than I was in that circumstance in Dallas, Texas. Whether you are a school teacher or an attorney or a business man, whatever your circumstance happens to be, seek the grace and gladness that glorifies God. This is what David was doing and this is what you need to do too.

You receive the grace and gladness that glorifies God by seeking God just as David outlines in the Bible here in Psalm 86. I am sure some of you could give me a testimony

³⁹ Psalm 86:9.

with regard to your life, just as I have given you a short testimony. This is the testimony of the grace and gladness that glorifies God. This is the lesson of the psalm.

Yes, the holiday season is past. We are entering the new year. Are you coping? I am sure you are. And you will do so as you seek the grace and gladness that glorifies God.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you. Thank you for the lesson that comes from David. We pray that it might come home to our hearts and show on our countenances as we seek the grace and gladness that glorifies you. Bless us to this end we do pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.