

I Will Call Upon You

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For tonight, then, I would invite you to turn to Psalm 86 which is our text for this evening. Psalm 86. It's remarkable to me that we're this far into preaching through the Psalms. I can remember when we got to Psalm 15 and I thought, "Wow, we're 10% done," and I don't know what the percentage of 86 divided by 150 is but as encouraging as that is, there is still a lot left to go and we'll be in the Psalms for another couple of years probably Tuesday by Tuesday.

So Psalm 86 is our text for this evening. It says that it's a prayer of David and it begins in verse 1... I've titled tonight's message "I Call Upon You." I call upon you which is what David is doing in these 17 verses. He says in verse 1,

1 Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me; For I am afflicted and needy. 2 Preserve my soul, for I am a godly man; O You my God, save Your servant who trusts in You. 3 Be gracious to me, O Lord, For to You I cry all day long. 4 Make glad the soul of Your servant, For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. 5 For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You. 6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; And give heed to the voice of my supplications! 7 In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, For You will answer me. 8 There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord, Nor are there any works like Yours. 9 All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And they shall glorify Your name. 10 For You are great and do wondrous deeds; You alone are God. 11 Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name. 12 I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, And will glorify Your name forever. 13 For Your lovingkindness toward me is great, And You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol. 14 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. 15 But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth. 16 Turn to me, and be gracious to me; Oh grant Your strength to Your servant, And save the son of Your handmaid. 17 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.

You know, one of the things, I think, that we've seen in part as we've gone through the first 85 Psalms and now coming to number 86 here, it's just the variety and the diversity of the settings in which the Psalmist offers his prayers to God and the different expressions of faith and the different expressions of hope in the midst of difficulty are varied. It's a broad canvas with many different colors painted on it as you read through the Psalter and it's a wonderful encouragement to recognize that there is going to be a difference in texture as we go through different seasons of life; that there will be times where the colors are bright, they're sunny, they're pleasant, they're vivid; there will be other times where the canvas is painted with darker tones of sorrow and tears and difficulty that afflict us; and to recognize that this is to be, as you go through the entire Psalter, you start to realize that there is not a monolithic nature of spiritual life but there are differences. Within an individual life, there are times of soul prosperity, there are times of seeming soul poverty; there are times of joy, there are times of difficulty; there are times of praise, there are times of great and deep lament. And if you think about your life as a Christian from that perspective, you would probably start to think, realize if you thought about it long enough to see that, yes, there was an ebb and a flow, sometimes the tide of joy came in, sometimes it went out, and it's just so very important for us to realize that when the tide has gone out spiritually, so to speak, when it seems like that you are greatly distressed and there is no relief for the distress of your soul, the distress of your life, to realize that there is a purpose at work even in that. These are not times to be despised and just simply to grit our teeth and wait for the tide to come back in; no, to realize that there is a spiritual purpose that God has at work in the midst of those things that is very important for us to understand, to embrace, and to respond properly to.

You see, as we've said so many times as we've gone through the Psalms, the times of distress and the times of spiritual poverty are not a sign necessarily of God's punishment on your life and it's not a sign that things are supposed to immediately get better simply because you pray. One of the things that God is cultivating in your life in those times is to learn something about the nature of humble dependence upon him as you are suffering in the midst of circumstances that cannot change. There is a place for us to learn to depend on the Lord alone. There is a place for us to learn to be content even when our circumstances are full of affliction and thorns rather than, you know, roses and happiness, so to speak. There is a place for us to learn as those who are slaves of Christ, to simply learn quiet submission, quiet trust in him, quiet dependence upon him even when life is very sad, very uncomfortable, very difficult. And it is difficult, in one sense, to say those things in the age in which we live, it is difficult to make that point because we have all been conditioned in one way or another to live in the moment, we've been conditioned by the prevailing sentiment in evangelical churches today that God is here to make things better instantly, we've been conditioned in other places that to be a Christian means you have to always have this happy face on, and that the services are always upbeat and loud and joyful, so called, but it's all superficial. It's not reality for it to always be that way, is it? None of us have a life that is like that. All of us have swum through deep waters. All of us have known the tide of affliction sweeping over our heads.

So what I appreciate about the Psalms, what I appreciate about the word of God is the earnest sense of reality of life that it brings to it. We don't have to pretend. We don't have to fake it. We don't have to fake faith with a sense of happiness when we're gathered together and then to go home and collapse in discouragement and despair and difficulty and all of that, you know, we can be real and the nature of the Psalms teaches us to have a real and vibrant faith that knows how to sing in the major key, knows how to play music in the minor key, knows how to go through affliction, knows how to go through prosperity just as the Apostle Paul says, "I know how to abase, I know how to abound. I know what it's like to live in poverty. I know what it's like to live in abundant circumstances." And we just need to embrace that and to realize that even in Christ, even in walking with him faithfully day by day, that there are going to be variations, there are going to be seasons, there are going to be difficulties that come alongside the joy and give a flavor and a texture to our lives.

It's not meant to all be sunshine, right? You know what all sunshine produces, right? A desert. Rain is good. Sometimes the storms are good. Sometimes the storms bring about a flowering of life that wouldn't be present in any other way. You know this from your own personal experience. Isn't it true that when you're going through a hard time, there is a certain refuge and safety and encouragement you find by being with someone who knows what affliction is like? Someone who knows how to weep with you as opposed to somebody who always has an artificial smile planted on their face? You know about that, don't you? Of course you do. We all do. Scripture tells us that God comforts us in all our affliction so that we would be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves have been comforted by God. If you would be a source of comfort to others and you would aspire after that, then it's understandable that there will be times of affliction that hurt you, that make life difficult for you, it's not a sign that something has gone wrong, it's simply a sign that God is working out your sanctification, God is conforming you to the image of Christ through your affliction and as we remember who our Savior is and what he did, our Savior tasted affliction as well far more than we ever would, the burden that he bore in Gethsemane, the burden that he bore at the cross as a completely innocent victim, so to speak, a voluntary victim, if there is a way to say that, is to realize that if we are going to be conformed to the image of Christ who was afflicted during his earthly life, then there are going to be times of affliction for us that are severe, that are deep, that are painful. We're not meant to avoid those, to run from them, to escape them, we're meant to persevere through them – mark this – in a dependent, submissive, trusting sense that looks to the hand of our Master to care for us when things seem so very difficult.

You see that spirit of trust and that spirit of supplication in David's prayer here in Psalm 86. Here in Psalm 86, David is praying for help in the midst of his trouble. As is usually the case with the Psalms, it's not entirely clear what the background, what the occasion of his suffering was, and I think in part that's by design. The lack of specific details in knowing what the affliction was helps us to realize that there is a general broad application to the things that are being said in the Psalms that we might otherwise lose if we knew every detail that lie behind the reason that he wrote. Here in Psalm 86, David's

prayer for help is pressing. It is urgent. He makes 15 requests in just these 17 verses and I'll leave it to you to count those out on your own another time. He is feeling the weight of affliction, he is feeling the weight of trouble in a way that it seems like every other word that comes out of his mouth, so to speak, is "God, help me. God, be with me. God, strengthen, help me." But, and this kind of ties what I've said by way of introduction with what I want to say going through the text here, and what gives us a sense of perspective and aspiration, a goal for us all to grow toward in our own spiritual lives as we're going through those deep waters, I want you to recognize this above all else as a general approach to Psalm 86: even though he makes 15 requests in these 17 verses – mark it – Psalm 86 is not a desperate cry of blind despair. To the contrary, it is a trusting prayer for God to be gracious to him. It is a dependent prayer, for sure, but it is a trusting prayer and what you'll find is as we go through this Psalm, this Psalm is not a prayer that simply says, "God, get me out of this trouble!" He doesn't approach God that way, he doesn't deal with God that way. It's not even his primary prayer. There are aspects of prayers for deliverance in this, yes, but as you go through Psalm 86, what you find is that there is praise for the character of God and there is prayer that God would use the season in his life to sanctify David and to make David into the man that God would have him to be. That is perhaps quite a challenge for some of us as we contemplate our life of prayer before the Lord. "God, get me out of this. God, fix this. God, change that person. Make this better." What you find as you go through here is David praying in a much richer, much deeper, much more meaningful sense than that superficial view of God that thinks that God's primary purpose is to make life easier for you; that God's primary purpose is to get you out of affliction and that's why God exists is to be your cosmic butler to tend to your every demand.

Well, that's not the case. That's not the way that we should think and it's not the way that we should pray either. You know, you think about it, it's true that one of the lovely aspects of our Lord Jesus Christ is that he voluntarily underwent the suffering that he went through. Jesus said in John 10, "No one has taken My life away from Me. I lay it down of My own accord." And you see that voluntary submission to the will of the Father for the suffering that he was about to undergo. Well, beloved, don't you see that that is exactly what we are intended to do as those who have been bought by his blood? Who have been bought to be a servant of his, a slave of his? Those that have been set apart for the purposes of God, that God saved you to set you apart for his purposes? Well, then if he brings affliction into your life, if he brings sorrow and difficulty into your life, your first response should be, "Lord, I depend upon You. Lord, in this I trust You, in this I ask for Your help and in this I will maintain my posture and my attitude of praise." It's a high and lofty call. It is different than what is commonly presented to us as what the nature of the Christian life is meant to be.

Well, let's take a look at Psalm 86. As we look at it in these first three verses, one of the first things that stands out as you read these opening verses is that David makes a textured use of the names of God. He uses different names of God to express different sentiments about his response to God in the midst of his suffering. Look at verse 1, he says, "Incline, Your ear, O LORD," the all caps indicating that underlying name in Hebrew, Yahweh. Yahweh, indicating that God is Israel's covenant-keeping Redeemer;

that as the covenant-keeping Redeemer, Yahweh is faithful to keep his promises to his people. There is a recognition of promise and faithfulness when God is addressed with that name Yahweh.

"Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me; For I am afflicted and needy. You are Yahweh. You are faithful. You keep Your promises. So God, here in my affliction and need, I ask You to incline Your ear and answer me in keeping with Your revealed character as a faithful promise-keeping God." The expression of faith is there right from the start. That's why I said earlier this is not a desperate cry of blind despair, this is a trusting prayer for God to be gracious to him. I want you to make a distinction in your mind between those two things: a blind cry of despair and a trusting prayer for help. You may have a sense of being overwhelmed within you but you can still trust your God even in that time as you call upon him by the names in which he's revealed himself.

"Incline Your ear, O LORD." He goes on in verse 2. He says, "Preserve my soul, for I am a godly man; O You my God," a different name for God and by the way, back about five or six years ago, I did a message on the names of God. You can look for that online if you'd like to explore this more. This is kind of a quick review of those things that I said some years ago.

God there, indicating the underlying Hebrew El or Elohim, indicating that God is powerful; that God is transcendent. Now it's not that the name Yahweh doesn't include that as well, it's just a different accent, a different emphasis depending on the name that is used. This name expresses the might of God. It is a term of his greatness. It is a term that says, "God, You have the strength and power to do wonders. You can do wonderful things because You are God, because You are powerful, because You are transcendent."

Now you go on in verse 3 and you see an even different word that is used. He says in verse 3, "Be gracious to me, O Lord," the word "Lord" there not all caps. Capital L and then lowercase. "For to You I cry all day long." It's the word Adonai meaning Master or Sovereign and this word, this name for God stresses his authority, his rule, and it invokes the sense that God in his position of authority, those who are followers of him have obligations and duties. To call God by this name, to call him by the name Lord or Adonai, is an expression of submission to him. "God, Adonai, I recognize Your authority. I submit to You. I trust You. I depend upon You." God as God, God as Elohim, recognizing his power, his transcendence, his greatness. God as Yahweh expressing his faithfulness, his tender care for his people, his promises to them that he will always keep because he knows the beginning from the end and he never changes. When he's promised to care for us, he will never deviate from that promise.

So the point here being that you see this trust in the God to whom he prays expressed in different ways by the name that he uses and so David here recognizing the nuanced names of God, recognizing the different aspects, the different ways in which he relates to God as one who trusts him as the covenant Redeemer, as one who needs him for his greatness and power as one who is in submission to him as Master and Sovereign, there's something else that you see here and he starts with that vertical dimension and David

lines himself up under this God in Psalm 86. Three times, David refers to himself as a servant. Psalm 86:2, "O You my God, save Your servant." Verse 4, "Make glad the soul of Your servant." Verse 16 which we'll come to in a little while, "grant Your strength to Your servant." There's a blessed beauty about that, isn't there? In this affliction, David comes not demanding immediate change but consciously aligns himself under the sovereign God and consciously says, "God, I am Your servant. I am dependent upon Your hand. I am in submission to Your authority." And that's why we say that Psalm 86 is a trusting prayer to his God, trusting him to the point that he aligns himself under God's authority, aligns himself under God's care and says, "I depend upon You. I need You. I trust You."

Although there is not a Selah in the text here, it's good for us to just step back and contemplate and reflect on the way that we pray to God in our times of sorrow and crisis. Beloved, the fact that you go through difficulty, the fact that you walk through a deep dark forest, the fact that you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, does not excuse you from the responsibilities and the duties and the prerogatives and the opportunities of faith. David said, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for You are with me," so that the affliction that David felt in Psalm 23, here in Psalm 86, the affliction drove him not to hostility toward God but drove him toward a sense of dependence, of trust, of an even heightened awareness of the presence of God with him.

So with that said, let's go through this Psalm in three different sections here and just take a closer look, first of all, at his trusting prayer for help. His trusting prayer for help, and it's without shame or embarrassment that David expresses his concern. Let's take one more look at the first four verses here. He says,

1 Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me; For [note that word as I go alone here] For I am afflicted and needy. 2 Preserve my soul, for I am a godly man; O You my God, save Your servant who trusts in You. 3 Be gracious to me, O Lord, For to You I cry all day long. 4 Make glad the soul of Your servant, For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

What he's doing here in these opening four verses is he is supporting his requests with his reasons for asking. He states his reasons for the requests he makes. It's not simply, "Deliver me," he asks for help and then he states his reason, he states the support for the request. He says, "Incline Your ear, O Yahweh, and answer me; For I am afflicted and needy. God, You're the covenant-keeping, faithful God. I ask You, therefore, to hear my prayer because I'm afflicted and needy. It is precisely because of who You are as the faithful God that I make my request. Here I am afflicted and needy, that's why I'm crying out to You as Yahweh. I am in need, You are the faithful God, therefore, I ask you to incline Your ear to me, for, because, I'm afflicted and needy."

Verse 2, "Preserve my soul, for I am a godly man." "God, I'm set apart for Your purposes. I'm a follower of Yours. I'm a disciple of Yours. So because of that, because I am Your servant," as we saw earlier, "God, therefore it is in Your interest to act in a way

that helps my soul. It is reasonable for me, it is in accordance with Your purposes, it is in accordance with Your will for You to help a man who is set apart for the purposes of God, a man who gladly owns You as his Master and thinks of himself as Your servant. So preserve my soul, Lord. I'm a godly man. I'm set apart for You."

Verse 3, "Be gracious to me, O Lord, For to You I cry all day long." "Be gracious to me. God, look at me in my sorrow. Look at me in my repeated, continual, ongoing request to You. I'm crying out to You, God. It's time for You to be gracious, don't You think?"

Verse 4, "Make glad the soul of Your servant, For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul."

Now what I want you to see is this, and you know, so much of a proper spirit of prayer is shaped by the attitude which you bring to it. I've said this in the past. Again, we've been conditioned to think about, you know, "How are you doing in prayer?" And you know, you immediately want to quantify that, that you know, you're praying, you had a 30 minute quiet time today or you had 15 minutes, or maybe it was really good and you had 40. This is nonsense to think in that way, to think that God is timing it and he's increasingly impressed the longer that you pray. This is nonsense. We should not think this way. Rather what you find in the Psalms is a cultivation of heart attitudes that is the deeper work, it is less quantifiable, but it is the purpose that we are to cultivate as we go to God in our difficulties and pray to him. And what you see here in these opening four verses is that David is not claiming that he deserves to be heard. He is not asserting his own merit as the basis upon which God should answer him. Rather he is making the humble prayer of a poor and needy servant. "God, here I am prostrate before you." He's on his knees. He is humbling seeking after God and he is presenting himself in the position of a servant who is in need rather than someone who deserves better than what he's getting in life. Do you see the difference? Do you see the contrast between that? It's not, "God, I deserve something better than this," it's, "God, I'm Your servant. I'm looking to You dependently. I'm asking You to be gracious to me." The very fact that he's asking for grace shows that he's not speaking in the language of merit or what he deserves. It's a humble prayer. The one growing in grace, the one growing in prayer is mindful that he's seeking God in terms of mercy, in terms of grace, grounding these requests not simply because life is uncomfortable but because God is gracious and he's especially gracious to those who are his own. "God, I'm here as Your own, You're gracious, I'm asking on the basis of what You have established, I'm asking according to Your mercy, I'm asking according to Your kindness, not because I deserve this and You are obligated to me. No, I'm the one obligated to You, Lord. I am Your servant. Hear my humble cry."

Now we've said that this is a trusting prayer for help and I went to great lengths to say that this was not a desperate cry of blind despair. I really want you to get this. I really want you to see this and this in a verse that has been especially meaningful to me over the years. He says in verse 5, he's made all of these requests in verse 4 and now he's going further, he's stating the grounds of his prayer even further and showing that he is grounding everything that he is saying in the character of the God to whom he prays, not on his own character, not on his own righteousness. Why does he ask God to incline his ear? Why does he ask God to preserve his soul, to be gracious, to make glad the soul of

his servant? On what basis does he pray that way to this Yahweh, this Elohim, this Adonai? Verse 5, this undergirds the first four verses, "For," once again, because, "I pray this way because,

5 For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.

You shower loyal love upon those who call upon You in truth. You're a good God. You are beneficent to those who trust You and reach out to You. Even when I call upon You, Father, confessing sin, what do I find except that You are ready to forgive?" This is a great trusting prayer for help. He is not resentful as though he doesn't deserve his adversity. He is stating plainly for all to see, 3,000 years later we read the words and we see that this man was trusting God, that everything that he prayed was rooted in the revealed character of God in ways that bring echoes of the way of God's self-disclosure to Moses in Exodus 34. We won't turn there, Exodus 34:6.

Beloved, do you see it? Do you bring your own state of heart before God in light of this verse and consider well the manner in which you pray? At the core of what David is saying is trust, is confidence, is a sure-footedness of faith grounded in who God is. "God, You're good. You're ready to forgive. You're abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You."

You know, tangent here. For those of you studying geometry or trigonometry, I'm sorry to introduce math terms like that, tangents, sines and cosines and all of that stuff that I never understood, but there is something to be said here. When you talk with people maybe who are approaching the end of their life, they're terminally ill and they know it, they've been resistant, blasphemous even in their life toward God and now they find that there's not much time left and they're reconsidering the nature of life, maybe it's a time of just a few seconds that they have to live, this is a great verse to remember and to point people to, that God even after a long life of sin is good and ready to forgive the sinner who comes to him. Why else would Christ have come? Didn't Christ himself demonstrate what I'm talking about as he spoke to the repentant thief on the cross? When that thief said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom," he's on the brink of death, he's nailed to his deathbed. He's not lying on it, he's vertically hanging on it and he is on the brink of eternity and when you compare Scripture with Scripture, the indication is that he had previously joined in the earlier moments in rebuking Christ, joining with the other thief in hurling insults at him, but something about observing Christ on the cross worked a change in his heart. The Spirit of God was at work in his heart and even though he was righteously being crucified, righteously being punished for his life of crime, even though he had been rebuking the Lord just moments earlier, there is a change of heart produced by the Spirit of God and in words that are recorded for us that we can look at 2,000 years later, we see him humbly calling out to Christ in utter weakness, in utter defeat, with only a very short time to live, and in the nature of crucifixion, having to press and manipulate his body just to have enough breath in his lungs to speak he says, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom." What did Christ say to him? What did he say? "Truly I say to you, today you'll be with Me in paradise."

Is that not the ultimate expression of how good our Lord is? Isn't it the ultimate expression of how ready to forgive he is? Isn't it amazing the abundance of his loyal love to show a thief like that that eternity would be open to him, the doors of paradise would open to him and he would be the personal guest of Christ himself in paradise that very day? That is the measure of how good our God is, our God that we know revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's how ready to forgive he is. That's how abundant in lovingkindness he is to all who call upon him. We should always be quick to offer that hope to desperate sinners, always quick to realize that the grace that saved us is open to them as long as they draw their breath; that there is nothing in God that prevents a sinner from coming to him. There is a full and free offer of the Gospel, free and full offer of forgiveness from a God who is abundant in lovingkindness to everyone who calls upon him and we can offer that hope to people even on their deathbed with full assurance that God is ready to forgive them no matter how long their prior life of sin may have been. So is it possible that those recognizing that death was about to strike them in the face could call on God in desperation and find that he was abundant in lovingkindness? Absolutely. Absolutely, and we will trust this God to have been abundant in lovingkindness to everyone who calls upon him no matter what the circumstances surrounding that call may have been. He's abundant in lovingkindness.

Now it's on that basis that David prays, it's on that basis that he trusts God. He's not resentful over undeserved adversity, in fact, you know, when you think about the illustration of the thief on the cross, he said to the other thief on the other side, he said, "We're suffering justly. We're getting what our crimes deserve." No resentment. What you find in Psalm 86 is David trusting God. He's trusted him for his goodness there in verse 5. Look at it, "For You, Lord, are good, that's why I pray to you in trust. You're good." He trust his loyal love. Look at verse 13, "For Your lovingkindness toward me is great." He trusts him for his mercy, verse 15, "But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth." So all of this recognition, all of this faith in who God is and who he has revealed himself to be, informs David's prayer. Because God is sympathetically disposed toward him, David says, "God, You might as well act for me, You might as well help me because this is what You're like, this is what You do, this is who You are." So he presents his prayer with confidence and God's mercy, God's goodness is presented to him in prayer as the basis upon which God himself should act.

Now look again at verse 1, "Incline Your ear, O LORD, and answer me." I love things like this. This first section closes on that same theme. Verse 6,

6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; And give heed to the voice of my supplications! 7 In the day of my trouble I shall call upon You, For You will answer me.

"God, answer me because I know You'll answer me." What a wonderful way to pray. "God, I know that You'll do this, therefore I'm asking You to do what I know that You

will do." This is the expression of faith. He closes the section on that theme. It is a trusting prayer for help.

Now as you continue on in the Psalm, you come to a second section which I've labeled conveniently: a trusting prayer of commitment. A trusting prayer of commitment as David's faith now, his expression of faith, moves from God's goodness, moves from his mercy to God's greatness. To his greatness. In fact, you can kind of think, it's a rough kind of way, not the most advanced way to think of the perfections of God, but when you think of God, a great way for you if you've just kind of starting to think in a more systematic way about who God is, who is God? Well, he's the Creator of heaven and earth, we know that, but also who is God? God is good and God is great. There are aspects of his perfections that manifest his goodness. There are aspects of his perfections that manifest his greatness, his omniscience, his omnipotence, his omnipresence, indicating the great vast nature of God transcendent above all.

So David here not only focuses on the goodness of God in these opening seven verses, he is calling upon the greatness of God as well. Look at verse 8. He says,

8 There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord, Nor are there any works like Yours. 9 All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And they shall glorify Your name.

What he's doing here at this particular point in the Psalm is he is contrasting the true God, Yahweh, Elohim, Adonai, the true God with the non-existent gods of pagan nations. God is incomparably great. "Lord, I realize that these nations have their false gods who are no real gods at all. Even in their imaginations, what they imagine their false gods to be is nothing like who You are. You're great. You're incomparably great."

How great is he? Look at verse 9. Stunning, breathtaking prophecy embedded in this Psalm that is still future to us today. "All nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord, And they shall glorify Your name." How great is our God? How great is the Lord Jesus Christ? He is so great that there is a coming day where nations will come and offer their worship to him. Still future but that's how great he is, he will command, he will deserve and he will receive the worship of nations and they will glorify his name with a single voice, acknowledging the one true God.

Why will they do that? Why will they worship in that way? Verse 10, "For," there it is again. That word "For" is a repeated use, has repeated use throughout this Psalm. Verse 10,

10 For You are great and do wondrous deeds; You alone are God.

Why are the nations going to worship him one day still future to us? Because he's great. Because he does wonderful deeds. Because he is the only true God and when Christ returns, the nations will be united in their worship of this God who is alone in his supremacy. That's the basis of his trust.

Philippians 2, we'll get there eventually if it ever stops snowing on Sundays. Every knee will bow of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. As I've said before, there is a coming day where humanity will be united, some by faith, some by forced compulsion, but all recognizing the one, great, central truth that we're privileged to know now as Christians, Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, and every tongue will confess it. Praise God that in his grace we're a little bit ahead of the curve.

Now, here's what I want you to see. I said this is a trusting prayer of commitment. He's emphasized the greatness of God and emphasized that nations will come and worship him because he's so great, now look at his prayer, verse 11. He's in affliction, beloved, remember that because that's really important here. He is in need. He has been crying to God all day long and lifting up his soul and somehow, in some way, that prayer has yet to be fully answered. That's why he's praying, right? He's feeling the weight of it. He's not thanking God for answered prayer here in Psalm 86, he says, "I have a need that I'm asking You to meet based on Your mercy and goodness and greatness."

What, then, shall we make of this prayer that begins in verse 11 that is central to the Psalm, central to the thrust of his whole prayer? This is amazing! Scripture is our best discipler. Not a peer. Not someone our age. Not a man. Scripture is our best discipler of what it means to be a follower of Christ. Scripture teaches us how to pray in the midst of affliction. Look what he prays here in verse 11. This is stunning. Staggering. He says in verse 11,

11 Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name. 12 I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, And will glorify Your name forever.

"The nations will do it in the future, God, I'll do it now. The nations will honor You, will recognize You in the future, I'll do it now." And what he is praying in these two verses is this: before he asks for relief from his enemies, and that's going to come later, before he mentions his enemies, he has a prior request that is more important to him by nature of the sequence in which he makes it. Here in verses 11 and 12, he is asking God to work on his own heart. He is asking God to instruct him, to shape him in his inner man so that David would be a man who is undivided in his commitment and loyalty. "God, before I ask You for anything else regarding my horizontal circumstances, God, I ask You to do a work in me. Unite my heart. Pull it together in a way so that it is undivided in its loyalty to You. God, what I really want, what my preeminent request is, is for You to do a work in my heart so that I would be faithful in response to Your goodness and to Your greatness."

Look at it again. "Teach me, O LORD. I'll walk in Your truth. I commit myself to that in prayer, O God. Teach me. Unite my heart. Pull it together so that it operates in the realm of a reverence and a godly fear for You that is worthy of Your goodness and Your greatness. God, before anything else happens, I want my inner man to be pure and to be

right before You." Now I ask you, I ask myself, in the midst of your affliction, does that even cross your mind as a proper subject for prayer? It was the first thing that David said and he says, "God, when You work in my heart in that way," in verse 11, "from that inner man united together by a work of Your Spirit, I will worship You. I will give thanks to You." Verse 12, "I'll give thanks to You, I'll glorify Your name forever." That is the commitment of his heart. That is the surpassing prayer that he makes here. Stunning. So much different than the mindset that says that God exists just to shape your circumstances into your liking. David says, "God, what I want You to do," I want to get this out again, so much different from the view that says what God's responsibility is is to shape your circumstances to your liking, what David prays is, "God, shape my inner man so that it is to Your liking." This is radically different. This is completely countercultural and when you start to see these themes bubbling up in the surface of Scripture, you realize how weak and how tawdry and how false so much of the teaching that is done in the name of God really is when it puts man at the center and God to serve man, it flips everything on its ear. It has nothing to do with the spirit that David shows here.

James Montgomery Boice said this and I quote, he says, "Most of us when we pray are concerned about deliverance and help and guidance and such things, but we are not nearly as concerned to be taught God's way and to be helped to serve him with an undivided heart. In other words, we want the blessings of salvation without the duties. We want prosperity and personal safety while we nevertheless go our own way. David was not like this. He knew his heart, how prone he was to wander from God, but he also knew he needed to go in God's way if he was to prosper spiritually." Selah. Think about it.

Now, God's character in past dealings with David make it so that that prayer of a united heart could be the only way that he could pray. "Unite my heart. I'll give thanks to You. I'll glorify You." Why? "For," here it is again. "God, why do I want You to do that in me so that I could present to You a heart that is united in fear and worship of You?" Verse 13, it's the only proper thing,

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

Sheol being the realm of the dead. He says, "God, You have acted upon me so that death holds no terror to me. God, You have worked in my life in a way that by Your faithfulness You have helped me in the past, I know that You'll help me again in the future. Then, God, the only proper thing for me to do is ask You to work in my heart so that I respond to You properly because Your great loyal love deserves no less."

This prayer for a true heart is at the center of the Psalm. Do you see it, beloved? Do you see what he's saying here? David is not simply praying for external relief from his circumstances, content to go on with a carnal heart, but is unmoved by the love of God, that is, divided in its affections, he is praying for an inner man that is worthy of his great God. "God, make me inside someone that rightly responds to You. Give me a heart that is purified, sanctified, so that I could respond to You in the way that Your goodness and

greatness so richly and preeminently deserve. That's what I want, God. I want a heart like that. Give me that first and foremost."

From that position of commitment, he now offers his final prayer, the third point here this evening. He makes a specific prayer for deliverance. A specific prayer for deliverance. For the first time, we've gone through 13 verses of a 17 verse Psalm, for the first time we see something, we see hints of the underlying reason that he's praying here in Psalm 86. He says in verse 14,

14 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.

As was so often the case, David was facing hostile opposition and these hostile men used their power to destroy anyone who was in their way. These proud men, these arrogant men, these godless men wanted David dead and they had no regard for his God. The rebellion of these violent men against the God whom they could not see, led to their hostility against David whom they could see. They can't get their hands on God, they'll gladly lay hands on his servants just so that they have the opportunity to vent their hostility.

But as soon as he says that, as soon as David lays out the horizontal occasion for his prayer, he immediately pivots back to lay hold of the character of God to inform his trust. "God, there are these violent men who are seeking to kill me but You, but by contrast," look at it there in verse 15 with me,

15 But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.

"Because you're like that, O God, in the midst of these circumstances," in verse 16, "I ask You then,

16 Turn to me, and be gracious to me; Oh grant Your strength to Your servant, And save the son of Your handmaid.

David took refuge, David fled to the Rock that was higher than he was. He fled to the fortress that was his sure defense against his enemies. Not a literal structure, he fled to the character of God. What he is saying here is profound, it's something that I need imprinted more on my own soul and I would venture to say that all of us do as well. Sure, we have people that are opposed to us. Sure, we have people that are hostile to us. Sure, we have people that speak against us. Okay, yeah, the enemies may be hostile but, beloved, God is not. He says in the midst of the hostility, look at it again in verse 15, "In the midst of their hostility against me, God, I know that You're merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth. From that great, loyal, faithful, good, great character of Yours, I ask You, then, to turn to me and be gracious to me." He's confident that God will because this is who God is. This is what he does in response to his own character for his servants.

So God's character draws him to pray with strength and for help. David calls himself, he says, "save the son of Your handmaid." The son of a handmaid was one who was born to a household slave. It's a humble way for David to ask his Master for his care. "God, I'm just a child of a servant. O Master, You who provide for Your household, You who care for those who are dependent upon You, save me. Help me."

Verse 17,

17 Show me a sign for good, That those who hate me may see it and be
ashamed, Because You, O Yahweh, have helped me and comforted me.

Why does he ask for a sign? What's he saying here? He wants the help to be open and visible and obvious. He wants it to be open and visible to all so that his enemies would understand that God was for him, that God was at work for him, and that their attacks were futile. He wants it clear so that their hostility against David, and by extension against David's God, would simply turn to an occasion for their own shame. "God, act in a way that saves me, that vindicates Your great and awesome name, and that puts them in their place. Let them shrink away in shame that they ever raised their hand against this good and great God full of lovingkindness, mercy and grace."

Three thousand years later today, we could ask this question: how merciful is this God? How gracious is this God? How abundant is his lovingkindness toward his people? We see it answered at the cross, don't we? We find God's disposition of love toward his people displayed when the Son of God in love offered himself up for their sins; when he in kindness, when he in mercy, when he in patience, absorbed the wrath of God on our behalf. That's love. That's goodness. That's greatness. No one would do that for another man. Paul said, "For a righteous man maybe someone would die, but no one, no one like Christ."

So what God revealed to Moses when he hid him in the cleft of the rock, which we sung about earlier, what he showed to David throughout the afflictions that David went through, and they saw in shadows, they saw in pieces, they saw it truly, they knew it fully, their heart responded to that revelation that they had, beloved, what I want you to see is that what we have now is even better. What we have is the fullest, most complete, undeniable expression of the love and mercy of God that human eyes could ever see, that human ears could ever hear, that a human tongue could ever declare. Jesus Christ slain for sinners. Jesus Christ giving himself up for sinners like you and me.

Oh beloved, are you a struggling believer in the midst of the storms? Listen to what the Apostle Paul said. He said,

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

If you are in Christ this evening, you can go to this God just like David did, you can go to him and with a fullness of trust, a fullness of informed faith say, "O God, from the depths of my heart I call upon You," and he who gave Christ will withhold no good thing.

Let's pray together.

O God, You are our God and we will ever praise You. We praise You for Your mercy in our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for Your surpassing greatness. There is no one like You. Who is like thee, O God? The answer is: no one is like You and, therefore, we reserve our deepest affection, we reserve our highest loyalty, we confirm our greatest praise for You and for You alone. And with David, Father, then, we pray that You would teach us Your way. We will walk in Your truth. We commit ourselves in that direction, O God. We ask You to unite our hearts that we would rightly fear and reverence and love Your holy name. In response to Christ, in response to Your word, O God, tonight we give thanks to You. With all our heart, tonight we glorify Your name. For the rest of eternity, Father, it will be our theme to praise, honor and glorify You according to Your great, infinite, intrinsic worth and for Your great mercy and love by which You saved us and have kept us and will keep us forevermore. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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