

Why Should You Pray?

Psalm 86:1-17

Halifax: 2 May 2004

Introduction

As most of you know,

- It has been our practice at Covenant Reformed to break from our regular sermon series on the first Sunday of the month.
- Last month, I finished a special first-Sunday-series on the Lord's Supper, and now as we begin the month of May,
 - I want to return to our former practice of preaching from a Psalm that corresponds to our regular preaching series.

In our regular series, we are presently working our way through the gospel of Matthew and have recently begun to consider our Lord's instruction on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount.

- To correspond with this topic, I thought it would be good for us to take Psalm 86 as our Psalm of the Month.
- The title of Psalm 86 is "A Prayer of David."
 - In it, we see David earnestly crying out to God.
 - You see him yearning and pleading with God with his whole heart.
 - I think every Christian seeing this prayer is inclined to say,
 - "Oh that I might learn to lift my soul to God like that!"
 - "Oh that I might learn to pray and not faint."
 - I think we all struggle with ADD when we start to pray...
 - It is hard for us continue without our minds being flooded with a thousand distractions.
- Christian, I believe there is help for you in Psalm 86.
 - This Psalm does not simply chastise you about your prayers—
 - not that that is wrong—Jesus chastises His disciples about their prayers on several occasions...
 - But this is not what is given in Psalm 86...
 - In this Psalm, the Spirit displays for you the **reason** for prayer.
 - We can see in David's words what is driving him to pray so earnestly.
 - We can understand why he prays as he does.
 - And if we can understand that, what a difference it will make in our prayers!

- Fervent prayer is not born of being told that you ought to pray more...
 - It is born when we come to be gripped with the reasons we have to pray.
 - You know how it is—
 - If you are asked to do something and you don't see why it needs to be done,
 - you won't be nearly as focused and eager about it as you will be if you see why it needs to be done.
 - Take a soldier—
 - If he has to go and fight in a war when he doesn't understand the cause of the war,
 - he may obey his commander,
 - but he has no heart for the cause.
 - But if he is desperately trying to defend his homeland from an invasion,
 - he will throw everything he has into the fray.
 - So it is with prayer.
 - The more you can understand the reason for prayer,
 - the more inclined you will be to give yourself wholly to prayer.
 - Consider then, from Psalm 86, why you should pray.

I. Pray because you are involved in a monumental cosmic war that has eternal consequences!

A. In verse 14, David shows that a terrible army has risen up against him.

- He says:
 - Psalm 86:14: O God, the proud have risen against me, And a mob of violent *men* have sought my life, And have not set You before them.
- 1. It is important to understand who David is when he says this.
 - a. He is the Lord's anointed.
 - 1) God had chosen David to be the head of His people—
 - 2) As God's anointed, David represents the people who are on the Lord's side...

- Those who are called out of this world to be God's very own special people.
 - To serve Him and live for Him and worship Him.
- 3) As the anointed one, David represented God and His cause on earth...
- He is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ whom God had appointed from before the world began...
 - God's own Son who came from heaven and clothed himself with our human flesh that He might redeem us for God from every tribe and tongue and nation.
- b. So when this proud and violent men rose against David...
- they were in fact rising against God.
 - They were doing all they could to attack God.
- 1) They could not storm the gates of heaven, but they can surely attack God's anointed on the earth—
- and that is what verse 14 shows that they did:
 - “they have risen up against me”
 - “violent men have sought my life.”
- 2) David is not praying here as a private person...
- He understands that these men are intent on overthrowing the kingdom of God that God has established.
 - It is not just that somebody did wrong to David—
 - It is that they oppose Christ and His kingdom and would destroy it completely if they could.
2. This is the struggle of the ages, the war of wars!
- a. This desperate battle began in the Garden of Eden when Adam took Satan's counsel and rebelled against God.
- 1) He believed that life would be found in doing his own will rather than in submitting to God—
- and so he ate of the forbidden fruit, thus declaring that he was rejecting God as his rightful sovereign.
- 2) God could have left the whole human race united with Adam in this rebellion...
- But He did not!

- a) Instead, He began to establish a kingdom of righteousness to stand in opposition to this kingdom of rebellion...
 - He began to call men and women out of the rebellion and to restore them to Himself...
 - And He promised to send Jesus Christ to redeem them and wash them from their sins.

- b) Obviously, as soon as those in the kingdom of rebellion saw those that were in the kingdom of God,
 - they opposed them and sought to destroy them.
 - They did not want to see anyone serving the true God, for they were in rebellion against Him.
 - And so, all through the ages
 - the kingdom of Satan has been at war with the kingdom of God in an all out effort to put down all devotion to God...
 - either by murder or by deception.

- b. Look at how the men who participate in this rebellion are described in v. 14:
 - 1) First, they are said to be **proud**...
 - This is the root of their problem—
 - They have the audacity to suppose that they know better than God!
 - They give themselves over to walk in their own way and to reject God's way.
 - Some of them even try to take the moral high ground against God!
 - They criticise and attack God's commandments and set up their own rule.
 - We have seen this even this week—
 - how some promote homosexuality when God forbids it.
 - The worst thing of all is that they do this with an air of moral superiority!
 - This is the height of arrogance.
 - These proud ones look with disdain on those who submit to God.
 - They mock and they jeer...
 - just as they mocked the Lord Jesus Himself when He was hear.
 - 2) Secondly, they are said to be **violent**...

- You remember how Cain rose up against his brother Able and murdered him...
 - He did it for the same reason the Jewish leaders killed Jesus Christ...
 - They are lashing out at God in whatever way they can.
 - They will stop at nothing.
- 3) Thirdly, they are said to be **a mob**...
- That is the word that is used in the New King James, and it is right in that it shows that they are many.
 - But the word should not be understood to imply that they are disorganised!
 - It is frequently translated as “an assembly!”
 - This pictures them in an organised rebellion as Psalm 2 speaks of...
 - Psalm 2:1-3: Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*, Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us.
 - They often are not conscious of exactly why they are doing what they are doing, but they oppose the kingdom of righteousness by their very nature and seek to throw it down one piece at a time.
- 4) Finally, they are said to be far from God...
- David says, they “have not set you before them.”
 - This confirms what we have seen...
 - The root of their problem is that they were not followers of God.
 - That is why they attacked the Lord’s anointed.
 - They continue in the rebellion of Adam.
 - They go their own way and reject God’s way.

TRANS> And so you see that David prays to God because he finds himself the target of this rebellious attack against God.

B. And I say, if you think about it...

- Is not this conflict at the root of all our supplications in this world?
- We cry out to God because we are in the middle of this monumental cosmic war with our enemies.

1. In verse 16-17, David prays that the enemies will not succeed.
 - v. 16: Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me! Give Your strength to Your servant, And save the son of Your maidservant. Show me a sign of good, that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed, because You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.
 - We ought to pray like this too if we love the kingdom of God!
- a. When he says, “O turn to me and have mercy on me!”
 - He asked God to change what He is doing,
 - because God has sent the enemies to chasten His church—
 - And David is interceding to ask God to change His course lest the church should be destroyed...
 - Do we not find the enemy making progress in our day?
 - Do we not see covenant children growing up and rebelling against God? The enemy has taken them!
 - Do we not see the church lowering her ordination standards and refusing to discipline her members when they refuse to repent?
 - Do we not see false doctrine making tremendous inroads?
 - Do we not see pragmatism governing the church rather than the word of God?
 - Should we not join with our David—King Jesus—in praying that God would turn to us again?
 - That He would have mercy on us?
- b. Should we not pray that He would give His strength to us His servants?
 - Surely we cannot fight against the enemy without His help!
 - The world is trying to tear us away from God in every way they can...
 - This is where the battle is fought
 - They want to turn you and all men against God.
 - The war is raging...
 - It is for you to cry out to Him for strength that we will be able to stand in the evil day...
 - that we will be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith; that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length

and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

- c. And it is for us to pray with Christ that we will be saved from their clutches when they have in some way taken hold of us.
 - That is the end of verse 16:
 - “Save the son of Your maidservant...”
 - The maidservant is the church, the Jerusalem above who is the mother of us all.
 - We are the seed of the woman to whom God’s promises were made, His people...
 - And we must ask Him to save us, for we are His... we are fighting for His kingdom.

TRANS> And not only do we pray for our salvation...

- 2. It is war! We must also pray for the destruction of the enemy!
 - This is what is prayed for in v. 17
 - v. 17: Show me a sign for good, That those who hate me may see *it* and be ashamed, Because You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.
 - a. We want all those who are proudly rebelling against God to be brought to shame!
 - Don’t you see them, standing proudly around the Lord of glory hanging on the cross!
 - Don’t you hear the jeers and their taunts?
 - This is the rage in man’s heart against His creator!
 - This is Satan’s kingdom, and there will be no peace in the world until it is brought down.
 - This rebellion must be squashed...
 - There is no compromise to be made with it, it must be crushed.
 - b. And what shame there will be for the members of this kingdom when God fully perfects His eternal kingdom!
 - 1) When His glory is revealed in His people and He makes them perfect in holiness and beauty!
 - Then the ugliness of the rebellion will be exposed for what it is!
 - Then the rebellious will hang their heads in shame.
 - But it will be too late for them to escape God’s judgement...

TRANS> But God can also bring them to shame now...

2) Oh that we might see many who are brought to shame before the judgement when it is too late for them to repent!

- That God made be pleased to demonstrate to all that we are His people and that He is our God.
 - That He might show us a sign for good—by helping us and comforting us.
- Do you remember how it was after Jesus rose from the dead?
 - Peter proclaimed to the crowd assembled that they are crucified the Lord of glory by wicked hands...
 - but that God had raised Him up and made Him to be Lord and Christ!
 - This was showing His anointed a token for God so that all could see it and be shamed!
- The three thousand were pricked in their hearts—
 - They loathed themselves and were ashamed because they saw what they had done!
 - They repented and were joined to God's people!
 - They left the kingdom of Satan and joined the kingdom of Christ...
 - That day about three thousand souls were added to them.

3) The goal of the war is to bring every thought captive to Jesus Christ.

- He is the Lord, and there will be no peace until we and all the world are in subjection to Him.
- He has ordained the preaching of the gospel to accomplish this until He returns again to judge the world in righteousness.

3. Our prayers in this world are prayers of a people who are engaged in this terrible war.

- Do we not even find this in the Lord's Prayer?
 - that all the world would hallow God's name (because they don't),
 - that His kingdom would come (meaning that Satan's is also destroyed),
 - that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven (an end to the rebellion),

- that He would provide for all our needs (we struggle in our bodies until our redemption is complete),
- that He would forgive our own rebellions (for there is no one that does not continue to sin),
- that He would lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (for we are often deceived and led astray by the enemy).
- It all has to do with the war that we are involved in until Jesus returns..
- We pray for the future that God has promised to us when righteousness will prevail in all the earth.

TRANS> When you understand the monumental cosmic war that is going on, you will pray, and you will pray fervently.

- And this leads to the second reason we are to pray...

II. Pray because you see your weakness to wage this war.

- David demonstrates His great need of God's help in this Psalm...

A. Look at how this Psalm begins!

- v. 1. "Bow down Your ear, O LORD, hear me; for I am poor and needy."
- a. David does not see himself as self-sufficient, but as poor and needy.
 - He is not one of those arrogant ones who pretend that they have come to rescue God's people!
 - David sees himself as one of the ones who needs to be rescued.
 - Even Jesus assumed this posture when He came into the world...
 - He cried out to God for mercy because He identified with us...
 - Especially when He took all our sins upon Himself on the cross,
 - He was heard to cry out for God's deliverance as one in great need.
- b. You will never really learn to pray as you should until you see your weakness in the battle that you are in.
 - 1) And I am not talking about the weakness of not being able to have everything go well for you...
 - to have the possessions you want...
 - to have it so that no body crosses you or disturbs you...
 - Jesus has not promised us peace like this but much tribulation...

- 2) I am talking about weakness as far as fighting the cosmic war!
- The weakness you find to do God's will when your enemies are strong and are trying to pull you away from God.
 - And I don't mean that we should blame other people for our wrongs...
 - They only succeed because we are not wholly devoted to God...
 - We pray because we are weak and need God's grace.
 - We recognise that we, to our shame, have no resources in ourselves...
 - We are poor and needy.

B. Look at the requests that follow in David's prayer—

1. In v. 2 he says:

- "Preserve my life [or my soul], for I am holy, you are my God, I am your servant."
- When he says, "I am holy," he means that he belongs to God—
 - As we saw before, he is out for God's cause...
- He is being attacked because he is God's servant,
 - He feels the enemy trying to pull him away from God...
 - He feels himself wearing down and so cries out to God to preserve him or keep him.
 - This is what Peter should have prayed for in the garden of Gethsemane, but he did not pray because he did not see his weakness.

2. Then in v. 3, he says, "Have mercy on me..."

- a. The word he uses here translated mercy is one that refers to a weak and helpless person crying out to a superior—
 - like a little child crying out for help from his parents...
 - God responds to such child like prayers in His people...
 - When we are proud and self-sufficient, He often brings more trouble...
 - But when we are humble and meek, He is tender and merciful to us.
- b. David says that he cries to God for this mercy all day long...
 - This speaks of prevailing prayer—
 - It is right to pray this way...
 - We saw last week that we should not use vain repetitions—

- line after line thrown thoughtlessly up to God again and again...
 - but this does not mean prayers should never be repeated!
- Jesus Himself is said to have prayed the same thing three times in the Garden of Gethsemane.
 - This was not vain repetition, but earnest imploring that pleases God!
 - It honours God for His helpless children to plead with Him as their only hope....
 - To daily cry to Him for mercy.
3. David goes on in verse 4 and asks God to rejoice his soul...
- a. He recognises how important it is to retain His joy in the Lord in the battle.
 - If you stop rejoicing in God, you will quickly fail...
 - When temptations come, the joy of the Lord is your strength...
 - If you delight in the temptation instead of in God,
 - You can be sure that you will quickly fall...
 - You forsake God because you love the world and the things in it.
 - b. But David lifts his soul up to God instead of sending it to the world to be filled and satisfied!
 - He says in effect:
 - “Here is my soul God,
 - Make me rejoice in your glorious beauty and way!”
 - He wants to find his joy in God, the source of all true happiness and lasting joy.
 - He has given up on finding his joy somewhere else,
 - but he knows that he is weak and that God must maintain his joy or it will slip away.
4. In verse 6-7, he pleads with God to hear Him on the basis of His promise.
- a. God is pleased with us when we bring our arguments to Him in prayer...
 - He has made promises for us to claim...
 - And His promise is that if we call on Him in the day of trouble, He will hear us and answer us.
 - That is just what David asks Him to do.
 - b. Come to God with confidence, looking to His promise.

TRANS> So you see how David is all along recognising his weakness and crying out to God earnestly because of it...

- And this leads us to the very heart of His prayer in verses 11-13.

C. With these words, he shows us where his need lies in the cosmic war!

- And need I say that this is where your need also lies!
1. He begins here by asking God to teach him His way so that he might walk in God's truth!
 - a. Is this not what Jesus ordered His church to be doing until He returns?
 - Did He not say:
 - "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you!"
 - If He has commanded that His disciples be taught all that He has commanded, does this not mean that it is out business to learn to observe all that He has commanded?
 - One of our great problems, because of the fall, is that we don't know God's way...
 - Mankind has gone his own way,
 - and when we come to Jesus, we have to start learning His way again.

TRANS> And this learning must continue all our life long.

- b. In asking for this, David shows us that even someone who had progressed as far as he had still needed to be taught God's way....
 - Though he was a prophet, he still had much to learn about walking in God's truth...
 - And he does not pretend that he can learn it from his own reason...
 - But he submits himself to God and asks God to teach him.
- c. But David does not stop with this...
 - He also asks God to **unite** his heart to fear God's name.
 - 1) He recognises that though he has been redeemed,
 - his heart is too often divided—
 - Just as Adam's heart went out after Satan's suggestion in the garden, so David finds his heart going out after things that are not God's will.

- This is the experience of every believer.
 - As I mentioned to you recently,
 - Persecutions try to drive you away from God's will...
 - And temptations try to draw you away from God and His way.
- 2) When you say, "Unite my heart to fear your name"
- You are asking God to bring all your being together to serve God and to delight in him alone...
 - That all your affections would be centred on Him.
 - You are tired of all the wavering and the double-mindedness...
 - You want all your desire to be fixed upon the living God.
2. And to what end? (v. 12)
- a. That you might praise Him with all your heart and glorify Him forever.
- David is saying, "If you teach me your way and unite my heart to fear your name...
 - The result will praise with my whole heart—I will adore you and delight in you because I will see you as you are...
 - And I will glorify you name forever—
 - There will be nothing left for me to do but to live for your glory, and this will be all that I will do if you will but teach me and unite my heart to you.
- b. What a great deliverance this is!
- 1) The root of man's problem is that his affections have been taken off of God so that he seeks his happiness in other places!
- This is what leads us to everlasting ruin in the fires of Hell.
 - This is our great offense toward God because He is worthy of all of our devotion...
 - To do less than to praise Him with all our heart and give glory to His name forever is to highly offend His justice.
 - Not because He is unjustly proud, but because He is truly God.
 - For this offence, God has sentenced us to eternal misery in the lowest Hell, the second death, which is the Lake of fire.
- 2) Here is true desperation!

- As a believer you know that the worst thing of all is to have God against you.
 - There is nothing you can do to escape His wrath...
 - There is no way you can come back to Him...
- But in verse 13 David declares that in His great mercy, God has indeed delivered him.
 - v. 13 “For great is your mercy toward me, and You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.”

TRANS> So you see that you are in great need as you wage the war lest you perish in the depths of Sheol forever!

- Seeing the strength of the enemy and knowing your own weakness will cause you to pray,
 - but not without the third reason for prayer that is given to us in this Psalm.

III. Pray because you see God’s strength and readiness to help you in this war.

- If you don’t see that God is both willing and able to help you, you will not pray.
 - David speaks much of God’s strength in this Psalm...
- A. Seven times, He refers to Him as **Adonah**, which is translated “Lord” in our English Bibles with lower case letters.
- This word means “master” and refers to God as the sovereign one who is over all.
 - In verses 8-10, David presents Adonah to us with these words:
 - v. 8-10: Among the gods *there is* none like You, O **Lord**; Nor *are there any works* like Your works. All nations whom You have made Shall come and worship before You, O **Lord**, And shall glorify Your name. For You *are* great, and do wondrous things; You alone *are* God.
1. He declares that there is none like Him.
 - a. Unlike the gods of this world...
 - be they angels or human judges and kings or false gods...
 - God can do whatever He pleases.
 - b. There are no works like His works...
 - 1) He alone is able to create all things of nothing...
 - And He alone is able to raise up nations and destroy them again.
 - He alone is able to change the human heart.

- 2) In verse 10 it says that He is great and does **wondrous things**
 - These **wondrous things** are things that no one else is able to do.
 - To us they are miracles, but to God they are His works.
- c. Consequently, prayer to Him is not in vain...
 - He is able to answer us and to deliver us when we cry out to Him.
2. David declares that all nations will come and worship Him.
 - a. God will, in time, bring the nations of the earth to worship Him.
 - Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.
 - b. At the appointed time, God called the gentiles to come and worship Him and they did...
 - Until His appointed time had come,
 - they did not worship Him,
 - but after Christ came, the gospel went into the world at His command...
 - And the nations began to believe and to turn to the Lord.
 - c. In the days to come, He has promised that all the nations will come—
 - and that they will worship and glorify Him...
 - And they will—
 - The war will be won.
 - This encourages those who have faith to pray and labour faithfully for the advance of His kingdom...
 - They do not say, “Well, God will do it anyway...”
 - but they are animated by God’s promise to go to battle for Him.

TRANS> So you see how we are encouraged to pray to Him because He is the sovereign Lord who is mighty to do whatever He pleases.

- But this is not enough in itself to encourage us to pray...
- It is not enough just to know that He is strong...

B. David also emphasises in this Psalm that He is good and kind.

1. In verse 5, David explains that he expects God to answer him because, He says:

- v. 5: “You are good and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.”
- Do you see what encouragement there is for us in these words?
- a. First, God is by nature **good**...
 - It would be an awful thing to have an absolute sovereign who was evil, but there is nothing better than to have an absolute sovereign who is good!
 - His natural disposition is to live in harmony with others as the Trinity is in perfect harmony.
 - It is only those are evil that God is against and repulsed by—and that is because He is good.
- b. But not only is He good, He is also ready to forgive!
 - 1) Here is a picture of Him waiting to receive sinners who repent and fly to Him for mercy!
 - He has never turned one away.
 - As it goes on to say,
 - “He is abundant in mercy to all those who call upon Him!”
 - 2) It doesn’t matter what you may have done!
 - As soon as you come to Him and desire His pardon and desire to serve Him, He will welcome you to Himself!
 - How glad those first converts must have been at Pentecost when they saw that even though they had crucified the Lord of glory,
 - God was ready with a pardon for each one of them.
 - 3) Do not let sin keep you from our gracious God!
 - It doesn’t matter what you have done—
 - There is mercy for you at the cross...
 - He shed His blood for us there and He invites us all to believe on Him for eternal life.
 - If you will come to Him, you will find abundant mercy.
 - The word mercy that is used here is one that speaks of His faithful covenant love...
 - The love that He promises to all those who believe.
 - David assures us that there is a lot of it, and that Adonai loves to express it upon us when we pray.

- How wonderful it will be to see all the ways that God answered our prayers that we do not even now understand!
- Just to use one example...
- Those times when we prayed for patience and he sent us all sorts of trouble that made us impatient!
 - In our childish understanding, we wonder why He did not answer us...
 - When in fact He was sending us to the school of His providence in answer our request...
 - We wanted to look like we were patient...
 - He wanted to work patience into us.
- But when we are in the middle of it, we often can't see His designs.
 - It is then that we must believe that He is abundant in mercy to all who call...
 - provided, of course, that they are committed to His purposes.

2. In verse 15, the same kind of encouragement is given again to animate prayer.

- v. 15: But You, O Lord, *are* a God full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.
- a. This is especially encouraging because David is comparing God to His enemies who are violent and against him.
 - God is altogether not like them!
 - David knows that God wishes to be known like this because He Himself revealed Himself with these words to Moses.
 - He revealed Himself in this way when Moses asked to see His glory:
 - Exodus 34:6-7: And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."
- b. How horrendous to be against such a God!
 - How can you oppose a God who only opposes evil, yet gladly receives those evil ones who repent and come to Him!
 - How could anyone continue to rebel against a God like this!
 - How could you join forces with those who oppose Him?

- c. But what a blessing it is for you if you will come to Him.
- This is paradise—there is nothing to compare!
 - You have all of His strength as the sovereign Lord tenderly directed toward blessing you and delivering you from your ruined estate.
 - **compassion** means that He looks upon us in our weakness with pity—he is stirred to action when He sees our need.
 - **gracious** means that He gives us a full and rich inheritance—He is ready with His gifts to lavish us with.
 - **longsuffering** means that He puts up with our shortcomings—He endures many wrongs from us and only chastens us for our good.
 - **abundant in mercy and truth** means that His covenant love is bountifully poured out on us.

This is how God is toward all those who forsake the world and come to serve Him.

So you see that you have every reason to pray!

- As you grow in this understanding, your prayers will also grow—
- You will become more fervent, more earnest and more regular in your prayers...
 - It is not just a matter of disciplining yourself to pray...
 - It is a matter of coming to grips with why prayer is so important.