

# "Incline Your Ear, O Lord, and Answer Me"

## Psalm 86

Turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 23. The passage we're about to read is actually the context supplied for Psalm 54, which isn't where we're going tonight. We don't know WHAT the context of Psalm 86 is but given the similarity between the petitions in the two psalms, I feel it's reasonable to look at them in the same light. So, David is on the run from Saul. He's already been anointed king, and Saul wants to kill him because he sees him as a threat, and Samuel records in 1 Samuel 23:13...

### **1 Samuel 23:13-15,19-20, 24-29**

**13 Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition. 14 And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand. 15 David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh.**

**19 Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon? 20 Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand.**

**24 And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. 25 And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told, so he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. 26 Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them, 27 a messenger came to Saul, saying, Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land. 28 So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. Therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. 29 And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi.**

Have you ever watched a suspenseful movie, or maybe a really close game or race, and found yourself holding your breath? This scene will make you do that! Saul had him! David was on the other side of the mountain, and Saul had but to close the circle, and he had him. Was it a coincidence that the Philistines attacked when they did? Nope, that was the LORD. Again, we don't know the context surrounding Psalm 86, but hopefully the context surrounding the very similarly worded Psalm 54 will put you in the frame of mind for better understanding David's words in Psalm 86. Let's pick up in verse one...

### **Psalm 86:1-7**

#### **1 A Prayer of David.**

**Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,**

**for I am poor and needy.  
2 Preserve my life, for I am godly;  
save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God.  
3 Be gracious to me, O Lord,  
for to you do I cry all the day.  
4 Gladden the soul of your servant,  
for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.  
5 For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,  
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.  
6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;  
listen to my plea for grace.  
7 In the day of my trouble I call upon you,  
for you answer me.**

Psalm 86 would be classified as a POEM OF LAMENT, a psalm describing the pain, confusion, and sometimes anger of the psalmist regarding the terrible state of the world and his circumstances. However, as we go along, we're going to see it transition to a POEM OF PRAISE. David described this psalm as a prayer, which is interesting because it doesn't really match the model of the majority of our teaching on prayer, does it? Most of our teaching tells us to start with PRAISE; that's even how Jesus taught His disciples to pray, but David doesn't. As is so easy to do, he starts off with his NEED.

This could be because his need was so great. It was consuming his thoughts, so his prayer starts off, "*O LORD, I really need You.*" We don't know David's exact circumstances, but we know they were LIFE-THREATENING. The interesting thought to me is that, in the midst of trouble, David's response, besides calling out to the Lord, was to WRITE IT DOWN. I mean, he might not have written it down as he was hiding from his enemies, but he wrote it down at some point, and this is a pretty candid shot of the king. It's vulnerable. There were biblical writers who chronicled the acts of the kings, good and bad, but these are the words of the king himself, and he's admitting needs that others may have never known otherwise. Our tendency is to attempt to CONCEAL problems and needs, right? You've got to keep up appearances. "How are you?" "Fine, and you?" Really?

David wasn't fine, he wrote about his need, and I for one am glad he did. It's good to be reminded that I'm not the only one who sometimes starts his prayers with his needs.

Still, it's hard to identify with David's plight. This is more than "struggling" with people at school or work. It's worse than being slandered or humiliated in public. If these people can get their hands on David, HE'S DEAD! Our Christian brothers and sisters in other parts of the world understand David's situation, but we're not there in this country...not yet anyway. The closest thing we could relate this to is our DIFFICULT INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS. There may be someone physically, or at a minimum, verbally and emotionally abusive in your life. Maybe there's someone who just seems "out to get you" by the way they treat you, or make things hard on you, or seek to make you look bad. It's easy to become bitter, but we don't see that in David. His focus is more on God than his circumstances.

He wrote, "**Preserve my life, for I am godly,**" which wasn't a boast. The word for "**godly**" can also be translated as "loyal" or even "saint," just like the Greek word translated "saint" in the New Testament. David's words, "**for I am godly,**" are a REFERENCE to his COVENANT RELATIONSHIP with the LORD, the Mosaic Covenant, a sentiment illustrated by Asaph in one of his psalms...

#### **Psalm 50:5**

**Gather to me my faithful ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!**

David was essentially saying, "*I can only call on You like this because of our relationship.*" David knew he had NO RIGHT to call upon God and be heard apart from this relationship, much like we call upon the LORD "in Jesus' Name" because of the shed blood of Jesus. As the writer of Hebrews wrote...

#### **Hebrews 10:19-22**

**19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**

As Tim said on Sunday, "We've been brought near by the blood of Jesus." David refers to himself as THE LORD'S SERVANT in verses 2, 4, and 16, establishing a THEME in this psalm, and I say that to point out that David was completely at the LORD'S disposal. He had no grounds to be able to make any request of the LORD, which is why he pleads, "**Be gracious to me, O Lord.**" He's UNWORTHY in and of himself, but His God has made him worthy in covenant (v. 2), just as Christ has made us worthy. David makes these requests, "**Incline your ear...answer me...Preserve my life...Be gracious to me...Gladden [my] soul,**" saying, "**for to YOU do I cry all the day...to YOU, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.**" WHY??? See it again...

#### **Psalm 86:5**

**For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,  
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.**

David cried out "all the day" because those who call upon Him can expect His goodness, forgiveness, and love. Notice, along with his request to KEEP HIM ALIVE, David also asks the LORD to MAKE HIM JOYFUL or GLAD. It's like he knew his problems weren't going away quickly or easily, so he asked the LORD to give him what he needed to get through it. You know how you can get LOW in difficult times? Perhaps you're in the midst of dire financial straits, and you're worried for your family. Perhaps you or someone you love is sick. Perhaps you've said "goodbye" (or "goodbye for now") to a loved one. Perhaps you've just GOT A LOT ON YOU. Such situations can DRAIN your life of JOY. Know that the LORD can do more than remove problems; He can SUSTAIN you as you GROW through them!

We can approach the LORD with great expectations, but there's also an element of HUMILITY here as well. The goodness, forgiveness, and steadfast love are indeed available, **"to all who call upon [Him]."** When we call upon the LORD, we admit need; we forsake the attitude that claims that we've got everything under control, and when we do, God shows Himself MIGHTY. The Apostle Peter wrote to those who were no strangers to suffering, and as he did, he encouraged them, saying...

**1 Peter 5:6-7**

**6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.**

David "humbled himself." The king saw himself merely as a "servant." It was only on the basis of the COVENANT RELATIONSHIP that the LORD had initiated with him that enabled him to make any request of God, and look at what happened in his heart as David's focus shifted from his problem to his God...

**Psalm 86:8-13**

**8 There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.**

**9 All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.**

**10 For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.**

**11 Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.**

**12 I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.**

**13 For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.**

NOW we see the PRAISE. Having remembered and called upon the One who was able to help him, David's spirit was filled with adoration. Having looked at the trouble all around him in PERSPECTIVE with the God who was able to save him THROUGH it, his concern is overwhelmed by praise and thanksgiving.

**"There is NONE LIKE YOU among the gods, O Lord!"** Throughout this psalm, David highlights the difference between our God and the gods of the world religions. Besides the fact that Christianity is true, and the rest are false, our God is INTIMATE!!! I know I use that word a lot, but it's accurate! Every other "god" is distant and unknowable, and that's because HE'S MADE UP! Our God, on the other hand, has revealed Himself to us so we might know Him, and what's more, He wants us to come close! He wants a RELATIONSHIP with us! He's the only God people can claim to know and not just know *about*.

David praised the Lord, saying that there were no works like His. He was almost certainly talking about the wonders of Creation, the calling of Abraham, the Exodus, the shepherding of a wayward Nation. I mean, God would've been justified in destroying Israel in her disobedience, but instead He corrected the Nation, continuing to bring the people along. This God brought them into their own Land, protecting them and providing for them. In other religions, humanity invented gods in an effort to explain reality to themselves, but our God invented man and bestowed life and purpose upon him. In other religions, the gods are merely deified humanity, whereas Ours is Divinity Incarnate. In so many gruesome acts of worship and through conquests from antiquity to today, many men have been called upon to die for their made-up god, but only in Christianity did the One True God willingly die for man!!! **"There are no works like Yours!"** In verse nine, David prophetically wrote...

**Psalm 86:9**

**All the nations you have made shall come  
and worship before you, O Lord,  
and shall glorify your name.**

Today, we observe a partial fulfillment of this in the Body of Christ scattered among nations around the world, but the Apostle John WITNESSED the ULTIMATE fulfillment in the Revelation, writing...

**Revelation 15:3-4**

**3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,**

**Great and amazing are your deeds,  
O Lord God the Almighty!  
Just and true are your ways,  
O King of the nations!  
4 Who will not fear, O Lord,  
and glorify your name?  
For you alone are holy.  
All nations will come  
and worship you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.**

That day is coming! Verse 11 is probably the passage that's arrested my heart more than any other in this chapter. In earnest devotion, David prays...

**Psalm 86:11**

**Teach me your way, O LORD,  
that I may walk in your truth;  
unite my heart to fear your name.**

**"Unite my heart to fear your name."** The Hebrew literally says, "Bind my heart to the fearing of your name." Proverbs states that WISDOM, or "the art of skillful living," BEGINS WITH SUCH A FEAR. I've taught on this before, but at times I feel we're too quick to SUPPRESS or TUCK AWAY the word FEAR in favor of "reverence," because "fear" doesn't make us feel good. Understand that I'm not saying that we should be in TERROR of the LORD, but something is lacking with "reverence." People can *have good thoughts* about God and yet live in disobedience and think they're *reverencing* Him, you know? They "LIKE" God (thumbs up), and that's about it. No, the FEAR OF THE LORD is an IMPERATIVE. It's the understanding that THINGS IN OUR LIVES MUST BE JUST SO BECAUSE OF HIM.

There are basketball court lines HERE. If I'm playing and part of my shoe is over the line, is that okay? What if it's just barely over? NO! THAT'S OUT OF BOUNDS!!! What about the DUE DATE OF A BILL? Is it okay to mail it the DAY AFTER? What about getting to work on time? What about driving the speed suggestion...I mean, LIMIT?! These are all things that we do (or should do) out of FEAR, not because we're afraid, but because we UNDERSTAND THAT WE MUST!

#### **John 14:6**

**Jesus said to him, I am THE way, and THE truth, and THE life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**

If we claim that Jesus is the only way to get to heaven, why wouldn't we demonstrate with our lives that HIS WORD IS THE ONLY WAY TO LIVE IN THIS WORLD??? That was David's sentiment.

Let me put it another way. My son, Joel, is FIVE. He sometimes struggles to sit still and listen in situations like these. Overall, he does a GREAT JOB, and I'm VERY PROUD of him. Sometimes, after service or other situations in which he knows he's called upon to BASICALLY ACT OLDER THAN HE IS, he'll ask me, "*Have I been a good boy?*" or "*Are you proud of me?*" and in those moments I see what it means to walk in the FEAR of the LORD. No, he isn't afraid of me (maybe of a pop on the rear). HE'S MINDFUL! He's measuring his words and actions by what he knows will PLEASE ME! THAT'S walking in the FEAR of the LORD. It's a godly mindfulness that guides everything in our lives because we know that He sees us and that WE WERE MADE TO PLEASE HIM. *What if, several times a day, we stopped and acknowledged, "God, You see me. Be glorified in this"?* Do you think our lives would look different? F.W. Grant SHARPLY put it this way (and I started to leave this out because it hurt so, but that just became more reason to share it with you). He said...

**"This is indeed what is everywhere the great lack among the people of God. How much of our lives is not spent in positive evil, but frittered away and lost in countless petty diversions which spoil effectually the positiveness of our testimony for God! How few can say with the Apostle [Paul], 'This one thing I do.' We are on the road—not at least, intentionally off it—but we stop to chase butterflies among the flowers, and make no progress. How Satan must wonder when he sees us turn away from 'the kingdoms and the glory of them,' when realized as his temptation, and yet yield ourselves with scarce a thought to endless trifles, lighter than a thistledown for which the child spends all his strength, and we laugh at him. If we examined our lives carefully in such an interest as this, how we**

would realize the multitude of needless anxieties, or self-imagined duties, or permitted relaxations, of 'innocent trifles,' which incessantly divert us from that in which alone is profit. How few perhaps would care to face such an examination day by day of the unwritten history of their lives."

David asked the LORD to UNITE his heart to FEAR God's Name. He knew he could deviate from God's will either from discouragement, distraction, or outright disobedience, so he asked the LORD to help him develop the SINGULAR FOCUS of FEARING HIS NAME regardless of the circumstances. Our upward call in Christ Jesus is too great to waste time living our lives any other way. Therefore, may we cry out like David, **"Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name."** Then, like David, **"we'll glorify [God's] name forever."** As David's troubles returned to mind, he wrote...

#### **Psalm 86:14-17**

**14 O God, insolent men have risen up against me;  
a band of ruthless men seeks my life,  
and they do not set you before them.**

**15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.**

**16 Turn to me and be gracious to me;  
give your strength to your servant,  
and save the son of your maidservant.**

**17 Show me a sign of your favor,  
that those who hate me may see and be put to shame  
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.**

It's striking that David's sentiment wasn't given to hatred of his enemies. Being the adept warrior that he was, it's possible that he could've taken care of the problematic individuals himself. Even if he couldn't, even if they proved too formidable a foe for him to take down, he could've allowed it to make him bitter. It easily happens, but we see no evidence of that in David. Instead, he pours out his cares to the Lord who cares for him, desiring above all to GLORIFY HIM through the situation. That's amazing! Is that your first thought when problems arise? I confess, it usually isn't mine, but when you think about it, isn't that why the LORD allows the problem in our lives in the first place?

In verse 14, David contrasts the ruthless, insolent men who are after him with the God of verse 15 who is, **"merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."** You see, wicked ruthlessness is all we can expect in this world, but God is different. David quoted from Exodus...

#### **Exodus 34:6**

**The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,**

Moses had asked the LORD to show him His glory, and the LORD agreed, if only to show him His back, since no man could behold His face and live. It's appropriate that David used these words to describe

the LORD in the midst of his trial because, while David wanted to be saved, more than anything, he wanted the LORD to be GLORIFIED in it all. He asked the LORD to show him a sign of His favor so that he and others would see. He wanted the world, including the ruthless men who were after him, to see God's GLORY.

David prayed, "**Show me a sign...**" This is a desperate plea. *"I need encouragement! Show me SOMETHING! ANYTHING! From time to time, I NEED TO KNOW YOU'RE WITH ME."* I can imagine Joseph praying something like this. Remember Joseph? Coat of many colors? He was his father's favorite, most dutiful son, and where'd that get him? Sold into slavery. He managed his Egyptian master's household with excellence and withstood the sexual advances of his master's wife, and his reward? He was thrown in prison. Throughout the text, we're told, "**The LORD was with Joseph,**" but you have to wonder if *HE* wondered at times, *"God, where are you? Why is this happening to me?"* Like David, Joseph was part of a story that was bigger than he could ever imagine, and God was glorified, and his family saved because these hardships were allowed into his life.

If following the LORD has taught me anything, it's taught me that humility comes through hard knocks, and you can't help others through their suffering without suffering first. AND I'M NOTHING... You and I are called to more than just being "good people" while we're in this world. We're called to walk in the FEAR OF THE LORD! It's a POWERFUL, HOLY, EXCITING CALL! Mark it down, though; if you decide to RUN HARD AFTER THIS CALLING, suffering will be a part of it. You and I will be ill-equipped to carry out the LORD'S calling until we've suffered a while, until we've SHARED IN HIS SUFFERINGS. These aren't troubles we bring upon ourselves or troubles common to all who live in a sin-broken world. I'm talking about trouble that's aimed at Jesus but hits you because you're walking that close to Him. How often has that really happened? I'll wager it doesn't make up the majority of our problems, but when it does occur, we may find ourselves asking, *"Why is this happening to me?"* The LORD has a purpose in it. Trust the process. As you lean into the process, you may get LOW like David and ask God for a sign of favor, anything to let you know that He's with you. I know we all KNOW (motioning) that He's with us; He's promised as much in His Word. However, in our weakness, sometimes we need to FEEL it.

Psalm 86 was that for me a few months ago. It's why I chose to teach this psalm. An ongoing situation that seems so completely beyond my control had come to a head and I found myself so discouraged. I felt helpless. *"God, I need You."* I opened my Bible to Psalms intending to read one set of five psalms, but I lost my place and ended up reading a different set. Coincidence? In that LOW, LOW MOMENT, OVERWHELMED AND DEFEATED, I found myself reading, "**Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.**" It's as if God swooped down and scooped me up. "I'm here. I've got you." I just sat in that chair that morning and wept as I read these precious words...

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8 There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,  
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and save the son of your maidservant.

17 Show me a sign of your favor,  
that those who hate me may see and be put to shame  
because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

And perhaps you came in here tonight needing such comfort, needing such a sign of God's favor. I pray you got it. The God of eternity is speaking to each one of you tonight. He loves you SO MUCH! He SEES you, He HEARS you, He KNOWS what's going on in your life and in your spirit, AND HE CARES.