

Undivided Hearts

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[0 : 00] Psalm 86, it's still in the collection of Korah, but this one's attributed to David.

Most likely, probably doesn't mean that David wrote it, but that it was written with maybe an event in David's life in mind or reflecting on David's life, but it's just a prayer of David.

It is possible that he wrote it, too, that it is a possibility, but it does come in the collection of the sons of Korah. Let me read it out loud, and we'll go through it together.

Let's read it out loud.

Let's read it out loud.

[1 : 44] Let's read it out loud. Let's read it out loud. Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth. Unite my heart to fear your name. I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.

For great is your steadfast love toward me. You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol. O God, 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. But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Turn to me and be gracious to me. Turn to me and be gracious to me. Give your strength to your servant and save the son of your maidservant. 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.

There are a lot of examples in Scripture of men and women clinging desperately to God for salvation or for his blessing. You can think of Genesis 32, when Jacob is wrestling with the Lord, and the Lord touches his hip socket and puts it on a joint.

[2 : 59] And so he's pretty much a limping, disabled man at that point. And yet he still clings to God for dear life and says, I will not let you go unless you bless me.

And God rewards Jacob's faith and dogged persistence by blessing him and renaming him Israel so that he becomes the father of all the nation of Israel. And similarly, although in very different circumstances, a Canaanite woman in Matthew 15, 21 to 28, she asks Jesus to have mercy on her daughter who was demon-possessed or oppressed by a demon.

And when Jesus, because his mission to the Gentiles would not begin in earnest until he had died and risen from the dead, he says to the woman, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. But the woman still comes and kneels before him and begs him, saying, yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.

So even after she was unceremoniously called a dog, knowing that only Jesus can help her, humbles herself before the Lord and clings to him and asks for his help in desperation.

- [4 : 13] And the message of Psalm 86 is much the same, that we should cling to the Lord with undivided hearts, because he alone is God and he alone can save.
- And the psalm is structured as a chiasm, which is a literary device where the verses are organized kind of concentrically, so that the verses in the first half kind of mirror the verses in the second half.
- And all the elements have in the chiasm have a corresponding part, matching part, except for the very middle, the center, which stands all alone and is there for the most emphasized part.
- It's the part that everything else in the psalm is pointing to. And so here in verses 1 to 7 and verses 14 to 17 are kind of corresponding parts, and they're both prayers to God.
- And then in the middle, verses 8 to 13, you find praise to God that form the heart of the psalm. So we're going to talk about the two outer sections of prayer first, verses 1 to 7 and 14 to 17.
- [5 : 10] They parallel each other. Verses 1 to 4 parallel verses 16 to 17. For example, if you can see in verse 3, the psalmist prays, Be gracious to me. And then likewise in verse 16, he says again, Be gracious to me.
- And in both sections, the psalmist addresses himself to God in verses 2, 4, and 16 as your servant, or the son of your maidservant, meaning basically a servant that was born into the household instead of being purchased.
- And the tone of the petition, the prayer in both sections, is that of a loyal servant who is seeking the protection of his lord and king. And so notice the emphasis that's repeated in verses 1 to 4 on soul trusting God, right?
- Because in verse 2, the psalmist says, Preserve my life for I am godly. I mean, that's not really boasting. He's saying that he's devoted to God. That he's, that's who he's defined by.
- And it's really explained by the following clause. He's where he says, Save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God. He's saying that's what he means. I am godly. You are my God. You're the one that I'm given to and devoted to.
- [6 : 15] And then again in verses 3 to 4, Be gracious to me, Lord, for to you do I cry all the day. Glad in the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. So in other words, he's saying this whole time, Lord, you alone are my God.
- I don't have anyone else, Lord. I am your servant and no one else is. There isn't anyone else I'm turning to for help. There isn't anyone else I'm crying out to. You're all I have, God. I'm trusting you.
- I'm counting on you. So Lord, answer me. So that's the tone. And so that's such so instructive for us, right? Do we seek God with this kind of desperation, right?
- And desire. Because it's so easy for us to take things into our own hands, isn't it, right? When we are faced with trouble or suffering, when we're facing need, when we're feeling poor and needy, like the psalmist is saying, our first impulse is often to try to solve our problems with human solutions, right?
- With our own hands. We take things into our own hands. Or we turn to other people, whether it's our spouses or to other friends or to someone else. We turn to them for help. But as people who belong to him, as God's servants, our primary sense of allegiance and dependence should be on God, right?
- [7 : 30] And his resources should be the first thing that we turn to. Of course, he could use other people, right? But our orientation should be first toward him and not toward others. And because our God is a gracious master who loves to come to the aid of his servants.

And then the psalmist, after that, turns to the basis for his prayer, the reason why he could pray this way to God in verses 5 to 7. And verses 5 to 7 is mirrored by verses 14 to 15.

And in both of those sections, the psalmist invokes God's character as the basis for his prayer. And in verse 5, he says, For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love.

And in verse 15, he says again, You, O Lord, are God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Right? Same phrase.

Abounding in steadfast love. And so the psalmist asks God boldly and desperately, but he doesn't come to God with a sense of entitlement. Right? Saying, oh, I deserve this.

[8 : 37] You know, I've done so much for you. You should help me. Like, that's not the attitude with which the psalmist comes. He says, he appeals to God's grace. Not because I'm blameless, but because you are good and forgiving.

Not because I am abounding in worth and merit, but because you are abounding in steadfast love. Lord, come to my aid in my time of trouble. That's the attitude of the psalmist. And that should inspire us to pray all the more.

Right? That truth. Because we don't need to earn a certain amount of, you know, credits with God in order for him to answer our prayers. Often subconsciously Christians think that God will answer their prayers because of their most recent performance.

How satisfactory it is. But if our performance were the basis, then we would not even be able to approach the throne of God to pray. Okay. It's because he is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness that we can come freely and boldly to God in prayer.

Look at, if you look at verses 3, 6, and 16. Three times in those places, the psalmist asks for God's grace. Be gracious to me. Be gracious to me. Be gracious to me. Be gracious to me. And the reason why you can ask for grace and expect God to answer is because, as verse 15 says, God is gracious.

[9 : 45] Because he is gracious. His character is the basis for our appeal to him, our plea to him. And so that two other sections, verses 1 to 7 and 14 to 17, are prayers.

And then they point to the middle section, which is praise to God, which is the center of the psalm. And within this middle section, the mirroring structure continues. So verse 9 says that the nations shall glorify your name.

And in verse 12, it says, I will glorify your name forever. And then two corresponding reasons are given. Why will the nations glorify God's name? Verse 10 says, for you are great and do wondrous things.

You alone are God. And then why will the psalmist glorify God's name? Verse 13 says, for great is your steadfast love toward me. You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

Right? So the reason in each of those cases for glorifying God's name is his greatness displayed in his wondrous acts of salvation. And even within that middle central section, verse 11 is the very crux of the entire psalm that the whole psalm is highlighting and bringing attention to by its structure.

[10 : 49] And it's the one verse that stands alone without any part that's mirroring it. And it's a petition. Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth.

Unite my heart to fear your name. There's a very clear logical flow to this psalm. Right? So because in verse 8, the psalmist just said, there is none like you among the gods, O Lord.

And then in verse 10, he said again, you alone are God. And so it's because there is none like God and because there's only one God that the psalmist is prompted to pray for God's way to prevail in his life.

And he says, unite my heart to fear your name. And the heart in Jewish conception is a lot more than just an emotional center that we think of. It's the volitional center. It's the whole inner being.

It's the control center of a human being, basically, where all of our hopes, desires, and loves spring from. And he's saying, unite my heart to fear your name because if there were more than one gods, if there were more than one being in the universe that were worthy of our attention, worthy of our worship, worthy of our illusions, then our hearts would be warranted in being divided.

[12 : 02] But because there's only one, he says, unite my heart because there's none like you, God. Unite my heart to fear your name. And so we should examine our lives. This is a good opportunity to do that.

Are there hopes and desires and loves in our lives that compete with God or conflict with his desires for our lives?

And so because there's only one God, we should worship and revere only him. Because there's only one God, we should depend on only him for salvation. And because there's only one God, there should be only one person in this world that we should cling to with this kind of faith and fear that the psalm is calling us to.

We should cling to the Lord with undivided hearts because he alone is God and he alone can save. And it's only those who have an undivided heart, those who pray to God, unite my heart to fear your name, that can then, as it says in verse 12, give thanks to God with his whole heart.

So our whole heart is given to God. We don't know the exact nature of the predicament that the psalmist was facing. Maybe it was David in one of his, he was fleeing for his life.

[13 : 08] But we know that it was life-threatening because he says that if God delivers them, he'll glorify God's name forever. And he says this, For great is your steadfast love toward me, you'll deliver my soul from the depths of Sheol.

Sheol is the realm of the dead. And this salvation from death that the psalmist is talking about points to and ultimately is fulfilled by Jesus' salvation, who saves us from death and eternal death and damnation.

And that Hebrew word Sheol gets translated into Greek in the New Testament as the word Hades. And Jesus says in Revelation 1, 18, Fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one.

I died and behold, I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys of death and Hades. Because Jesus is the one who, the son of God who died for the sins of his people.

And because he was raised victoriously from the dead, he is the only one that the psalm, like the psalm is crying out to, the only one who can save us from sin and its consequence, which is death.

[14 : 14] But in order to be saved like this, we need to renounce our sins and cling to him. We have to unite our hearts to fear his name. And Jesus said in Matthew 16, 24 to 26, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whoever would save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?

For what shall a man give in return for his soul? It's nothing less than death to ourselves. We have to forsake all of our own selfish hopes, desires, and loves in order to align ourselves entirely to Christ.

That's what it means to unite our hearts, to fear God's name. But we can do this gladly because of the steadfast love of God displayed in the cross of Jesus Christ. And when we do this, we find, when we've actually tasted and seen Jesus Christ, we find that Christ was worth more than any loss or sacrifice that we incurred or that we endured on account of him.

And so that's the call of this song, that we should cling to him with undivided hearts because he alone is God.