

# PSALM 86

This psalm is entitled “a prayer of David;” probably it was not penned upon any particular occasion, but was a prayer he often used himself, and recommended to others for their use, especially in a day of affliction. Many think that David penned this prayer as a type of Christ, “who in the days of his flesh offered up strong cries,” ~~☩~~ Hebrews 5:7. David, in this prayer (according to the nature of that duty),

**I.** Gives glory to God (v. 8-10, 12, 13).

**II.** Seeks for grace and favour from God, that God would hear his prayers (v. 1, 6, 7), preserve and save him, and be merciful to him (v. 2, 3, 16), that he would give him joy, and grace, and strength, and put honour upon him (v. 4, 11, 17). He pleads God's goodness (v. 5, 15) and the malice of his enemies (v. 14). In singing this we must, as David did, lift up our souls to God with application.

## ~~☩~~ PSALM 86:1-7

### HUMBLE PETITIONS

#### *A Prayer of David.*

This psalm was published under the title of *a prayer of David*; not as if David sung all his prayers, but into some of his songs he inserted prayers; for a psalm will admit the expressions of any pious and devout affections. But it is observable how very plain the language of this psalm is, and how little there is in it of poetic flights or figures, in comparison with some other psalms; for the flourishes of wit are not the proper ornaments of prayer. Now here we may observe,

**I.** The petitions he puts up to God. It is true, prayer accidentally may preach, but it is most fit that (as it is in this prayer) every passage should be directed to God, for such is the nature of prayer as it is here described (v. 4): *Unto thee, O Lord! do I lift up my soul*, as he had said ~~☩~~ Psalm 25:1. In all the parts of prayer the soul must ascend upon the wings of faith

and holy desire, and be lifted up to God, to meet the communications of his grace, and in an expectation raised very high of great things from him.

**1.** He begs that God would give a gracious audience to his prayers (v. 1): *Bow down thy ear, O Lord! hear me.* When God hears our prayers it is fitly said that he *bows down his ear* to them, for it is admirable condescension in God that he is pleased to take notice of such mean creatures as we are and such defective prayers as ours are. He repeats this again (v. 6): “*Give ear, O Lord! unto my prayer, a favourable ear, though it be whispered, though it be stammered; attend to the voice of my supplications.*” Not that God needs to have his affection stirred up by any thing that we can say; but thus we must express our desire of his favour. The Son of David spoke it with assurance and pleasure (~~414~~ John 11:41, 42), *Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me; and I know that thou hearest me always.*

**2.** He begs that God would take him under his special protection, and so be the author of his salvation (v. 2): *Preserve my soul; save thy servant.* It was David's soul that was God's servant; for those only serve God acceptably that *serve him with their spirits.* David's concern is about his soul; if we understand it of his natural life, it teaches us that the best self-preservation is to commit ourselves to God's keeping and by faith and prayer to make our Creator our preserver. But it may be understood of his spiritual life, the life of the soul as distinct from the body: “*Preserve my soul from that one evil and dangerous thing to souls, even from sin; preserve my soul, and so save me.*” All those whom God will save he preserves, and will preserve them to his heavenly kingdom.

**3.** He begs that God would look upon him with an eye of pity and compassion (v. 3): *Be merciful to me, O Lord!* It is mercy in God to pardon our sins and to help us out of our distresses; both these are included in this prayer, *God be merciful to me.* “Men show no mercy; we ourselves deserve no mercy, but, Lord, for mercy-sake, be *merciful unto me.*”

**4.** He begs that God would fill him with inward comfort (v. 4): *Rejoice the soul of thy servant.* It is God only that can *put gladness into the heart and make the soul to rejoice,* and then, and not till then, the joy is full; and, as it is the duty of those who are God's servants to *serve him with gladness,* so it is their privilege to be *filled with joy and peace in believing,* and they may in faith pray, not only that God will preserve their souls, but that he

will rejoice their souls, and the *joy of the Lord* will be *their strength*. Observe, When he prays, *Rejoice my soul*, he adds, *For unto thee do I lift up my soul*. Then we may expect comfort from God when we take care to keep up our communion with God: prayer is the nurse of spiritual joy.

## II. The pleas with which he enforces these petitions.

1. He pleads his relation to God and interest in him: “Thou art my God, to whom I have devoted myself, and on whom I depend, and I am thy servant (v. 2), in subjection to thee, and therefore looking for protection from thee.”

2. He pleads his distress: “*Hear me, for I am poor and needy*, therefore I want thy help, therefore none else will hear me.” God is the poor man's King, whose glory it is to *save the souls of the needy*; those who are poor in spirit, who see themselves empty and necessitous, are most welcome to the God of all grace.

3. He pleads God's good will towards all that seek him (v. 5): “To thee do I *lift up my soul* in desire and expectation; *for thou, Lord, art good*;” and whither should beggars go but to the door of the good house-keeper? The goodness of God's nature is a great encouragement to us in all our addresses to him. His goodness appears in two things, giving and forgiving.

(1.) He is a sin-pardoning God; not only he can forgive, but he is ready to forgive, more ready to forgive than we are to repent. *I said, I will confess, and thou forgavest*, <sup>4815</sup>Psalm 32:5.

(2.) He is a prayer-hearing God; he is plenteous in mercy, very full, and very free, both rich and liberal unto *all those that call upon him*; he has wherewithal to supply all their needs and is openhanded in granting that supply.

4. He pleads God's good work in himself, by which he had qualified him for the tokens of his favour. Three things were wrought in him by divine grace, which he looked upon as earnest of all good: —

(1.) A conformity to God (v. 2): *I am holy*, therefore preserve my soul; for those whom the Spirit sanctifies he will preserve. He does not say this in pride and vain glory, but with humble thankfulness to God. *I am one whom thou favourest* (so the margin reads it), whom thou hast *set apart*

*for thyself.* If God has begun a good work of grace in us, we must own that *the time was a time of love. Then was I in his eyes as one that found favour,* and whom God hath taken into his favour he will take under his protection. *All his saints are in thy hand,* ~~451B~~ Deuteronomy 33:3. Observe, *I am needy* (v. 1), yet *I am holy* (v. 2), holy and yet needy, *poor in the world, but rich in faith.* Those who preserve their purity in their greatest poverty may assure themselves that God will preserve their comforts, will preserve their souls.

**(2.)** A confidence in God: *Save thy servant that trusteth in thee.* Those that are holy must nevertheless not trust in themselves, nor in their own righteousness, but only in God and his grace. Those that trust in God may expect salvation from him.

**(3.)** A disposition to communion with God. He hopes God will answer his prayers, because he had inclined him to pray.

**[1.]** To be constant in prayer: *I cry unto thee daily, and all the day,* v. 3. It is thus our duty to pray always, without ceasing, and to continue instant in prayer; and then we may hope to have our prayers heard which we make in the time of trouble, if we have made conscience of the duty at other times, at all times. It is comfortable if an affliction finds the wheels of prayer a-going, and that they are not then to be set a-going.

**[2.]** To be inward with God in prayer, to *lift up his soul* to him, v. 4. Then we may hope that God will meet us with his mercies, when we in our prayers send forth our souls as it were to meet him.

**[3.]** To be in a special manner earnest with God in prayer when he was in affliction (v. 7): *“In the day of my trouble, whatever others do, I will call upon thee, and commit my case to thee, for thou wilt hear and answer me, and I shall not seek in vain, as those did who cried, O Baal! hear us; but there was no voice, nor any that regarded,”* ~~418B~~ 1 Kings 18:29.

## ~~481B~~ PSALM 86:8-17

### PETITIONS AND PRAISES

David is here going on in his prayer.

**I.** He gives glory to God; for we ought in our prayers to praise him, ascribing kingdom, power, and glory, to him, with the most humble and reverent adorations.

**1.** As a being of unparalleled perfection, such a one that there is none like him nor any to be compared with him, v. 8. *Among the gods*, the false gods, whom the heathens worshipped, the angels, the kings of the earth, among them all, *there is none like unto thee, O Lord!* none so wise, so mighty, so good; *neither are there any works like unto thy works*, which is an undeniable proof that there is none like him; his own works praise him, and the best way we have of praising him is by acknowledging that there is none like him.

**2.** As the fountain of all being and the centre of all praise (v. 9): “*Thou hast made all nations*, made them all of one blood; they all derive their being from thee, and have a constant dependence on thee, and therefore *they shall come and worship before thee and glorify thy name.*” This was in part fulfilled in the multitude of proselytes to the Jewish religion in the days of David and Solomon, but was to have its full accomplishment in the days of the Messiah, when some out of every kingdom and nation should be effectually brought in to praise God, <sup><670></sup>Revelation 7:9. It was by Christ that God made all nations, for without him was not any thing made that was made, and therefore through Christ, and by the power of his gospel and grace, all nations shall be brought to *worship before God*, <sup><263></sup>Isaiah 66:23.

**3.** As a being infinitely great (v. 10): “Therefore all nations shall worship before thee, because as King of nations *thou art great*, thy sovereignty absolute and incontestable, thy majesty terrible and insupportable, thy power universal and irresistible, thy riches vast and inexhaustible, thy dominion boundless and unquestionable; and, for the proof of this, *thou doest wondrous things*, which all nations admire, and whence they might easily infer that thou art God alone, not only none like thee, but none besides thee.” Let us always entertain great thoughts of this great God, and be filled with holy admiration of this God who doeth wonders; and let him alone have our hearts who is God alone.

**4.** As a being infinitely good. Man is bad, very wicked and vile (v. 14); no mercy is to be expected from him; *but thou, O Lord! art a God full of compassion, and gracious*, v. 15. This is that attribute by which he

proclaims his name, and by which we are therefore to proclaim it, <sup>(2346)</sup>Exodus 34:6, 7. It is his goodness that is over all his works, and therefore should fill all our praises; and this is our comfort, in reference to the wickedness of the world we live in, that, however it be, God is good. Men are barbarous, but God is gracious; men are false, but God is faithful. God is not only compassionate, but full of compassion, and in him *mercy rejoiceth against judgment*. He is long-suffering towards us, though we forfeit his favour and provoke him to anger, and he is *plenteous in mercy and truth*, as faithful in performing as he was free in promising.

**5.** As a kind friend and bountiful benefactor to him. We ought to praise God as good in himself, but we do it most feelingly when we observe how good he has been to us. This therefore the psalmist dwells upon with most pleasure, v. 12, 13. He had said (v. 9), *All nations shall praise thee, O Lord! and glorify thy name*. It is some satisfaction to a good man to think that others shall praise and glorify God, but it is his greatest care and pleasure to do it himself. “Whatever others do” (says David), “*I will praise thee, O Lord my God!* not only as the Lord, but as my God; and I will do it with all my heart; I will be ready to do it and cordial in it; I will do it with cheerfulness and liveliness, with a sincere regard to thy honour; for *I will glorify thy name*, not for a time, but for evermore. I will do it as long as I live, and hope to be doing it to eternity.” With good reason does he resolve to be thus particular in praising God, because God had shown him particular favours: *For great is thy mercy towards me*. The fountain of mercy is inexhaustibly full; the streams of mercy are inestimably rich. When we speak of God's mercy to us, it becomes us thus to magnify it: *Great is thy mercy towards me*. Of the greatness of God's mercy he gives this instance, *Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell*, from death, from so great a death, as St. Paul (<sup>(2347)</sup>2 Corinthians 1:10), from eternal death, so even some of the Jewish writers understand it. David knew he deserved to be cast off for ever into the lowest hell for his sin in the matter of Uriah; but Nathan assured him that the Lord had *taken away his sin*, and by that word he was delivered from the lowest hell, and herein God's mercy was great towards him. Even the best saints owe it, not to their own merit, but to the mercy of God, that they are saved from the lowest hell; and the consideration of that should greatly enlarge their hearts in praising the mercy of God, which they are obliged to glorify for evermore. So glorious; so gracious, a rescue from everlasting misery, justly requires the return of everlasting praise.

**II.** He prays earnestly for mercy and grace from God. He complains of the restless and implacable malice of his enemies against him (v. 14): “Lord, be thou for me; for there are many against me.” He then takes notice of their character; they were *proud men* that looked with disdain upon poor David. (Many are made persecutors by their pride.) They were *violent men*, that would carry all before them by force, right or wrong. They were *terrible formidable men* (so some), that did what they could to frighten all about them. He notices their number: There were *assemblies* of them; they were men in authority and met in councils and courts, or men for conversation, and met in clubs; but, being assembled, they were the more capable of doing mischief. He notices their enmity to him: “They *rise up against me* in open rebellion; they not only plot, but they put their plots in execution as far as they can; and the design is not only to depose me, but to destroy me: they seek after my life, to slay me; after my soul, to damn me, if it lay in their power.” And, *lastly*, He notices their distance and estrangement from God, which were at the bottom of their enmity to David: “*They have not set thee before them*; and what good can be expected from those that have no fear of God before their eyes? Lord, appear against them, for they are thy enemies as well as mine.” His petitions are,

**1.** For the operations of God's grace in him, v. 11. He prays that God would give him,

**(1.)** An understanding heart, that he would inform and instruct him concerning his duty: “*Teach me thy way, O Lord!* the way that thou hast appointed me to walk in; when I am in doubt concerning it, make it plain to me what I should do; let me hear the voice saying, *This is the way,*” <sup><AB></sup>Isaiah 30:21. David was well taught in the things of God, and yet was sensible he needed further instruction, and many a time could not trust his own judgment: *Teach me thy way; I will walk in thy truth.* One would think it should be, *Teach me thy truth, and I will walk in thy way;* but it comes all to one; it is the way of truth that God teaches and that we must choose to walk in, <sup><AB></sup>Psalm 119:30. Christ is the way and the truth, and we must both learn Christ and walk in him. We cannot walk in God's way and truth unless he teach us; and, if we expect he should teach us, we must resolve to be governed by his teachings, <sup><AB></sup>Isaiah 2:3.

**(2.)** An upright heart: “*Unite my heart to fear thy name.* Make me sincere in religion. A hypocrite has a double heart; let mine be single and entire for God, not divided between him and the world, not straggling from

him.” Our hearts are apt to wander and hang loose; their powers and faculties wander after a thousand foreign things; we have therefore need of God’s grace to unite them, that we may serve God with all that is within us, and all little enough to be employed in his service. “Let my heart be fixed for God, and firm and faithful to him, and fervent in serving him; that is a united heart.”

**2.** For the tokens of God’s favour to him, v. 16, 17. Three things he here prays for: —

**(1.)** That God would speak peace and comfort to him: “*O turn unto me*, as to one thou lovest and hast a kind and tender concern for. My enemies turn against me, my friends turn from me; Lord, do thou turn to me and have mercy upon me; it will be a comfort to me to know that thou pitiest me.”

**(2.)** That God would work deliverance for him, and set him in safety: “Give me *thy strength*; put strength into me, that I may help myself, and put forth thy strength for me, that I may be saved out of the hands of those that seek my ruin.” He pleads relation: “I am *thy servant*; I am so by birth, as *the son of thy handmaid*, born in thy house, and therefore thou art my rightful owner and proprietor, from whom I may expect protection. *I am thine; save me.*” The children of godly parents, who were betimes dedicated to the Lord, may plead it with him; if they come under the discipline of his family, they are entitled to the privileges of it.

**(3.)** That God would put a reputation on him: “*Show me a token for good*; make it to appear to others as well as to myself that thou art doing me good, and designing further good for me. Let me have some unquestionable illustrious instances of thy favour to me, *that those who hate me may see it, and be ashamed* of their enmity to me, as they will have reason to be when they perceive that *thou, Lord, hast helped me and comforted me*, and that therefore they have been striving against God, opposing one whom he owns, and that they have been striving in vain to ruin and vex one whom God himself has undertaken to help and comfort.” The joy of the saints shall be the shame of their persecutors.