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Psalm 86 "Applying What I Know In Prayer" July 15, 2018

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Psalm 86.

We have mentioned you to a couple times as we've been going through these studies through some of the Psalms that the Psalms are part of the poetry books in the Old Testament that run from the book of Job and they stop at the Song of Solomon. But they are unique for a couple of things. Obviously, there's great depth to poetry to express understanding and feeling, and that's certainly helpful, but the presumption that these books in particular make is that you are interested in your relationship with God and their application of the truths in them are intended to be applied immediately. They are present tense in their application, so you'll be able to take what you learn this morning and put it into practice this afternoon. And that really is the function of these poetic books.

Notice in the introduction. It just simply says, "A Prayer of David." The word "tefilla" is a word that means to pray, but it is used despairingly in the Psalm. In fact, there are only five Psalms introduced as that. Three of them David wrote: Psalm 17, this one, and Psalm 142. There's a Psalm of the afflicted in Psalm 102 that's kind of ahead of us yet. And then the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90. In one way or another, most of the Psalms bring you to praying or seeking God, but these are designed by the Lord and set before us as prayers that we can study and learn from in terms of our walks with God.

David here is facing a problem with a multitude of people that want to kill him. You would think that you might find that in verse 1, hey, Lord, they want to kill me. Instead you find it in verse 14. David, by the time he gets to the end of the Psalm, introduces his need. But by then he has spent a lot of time considering the goodness of God and the worry over this violent mob bent on taking his life. David has now seen God sharpen in his understanding significantly. And so the threat is not nearly as bad as it was when he started in proportion to him knowing the Lord.

Also, since this is a prayer we want to kind of study, there's no indication in the prayer at all that God answered his prayers yet. So this isn't a prayer that is delivered after the fact, but it is one that is delivered in the current situation. And the fact that David finds hope and rest and even worship is motivated by faith unsupported, if you will, by feelings that might change when the situation does. He only had God's word to go on. Not able to look back, say, well, the Lord came through. For now he takes deliberate steps to just stand on God's word and in God's promises. But you have been given three, and this is one of the three, prayers of a man after God's own heart on how he dealt with his concerns and how he brought them to the Lord.

You might be surprised to know that all but two of these verses are quotes of other portions of scripture. And certainly, one of the purposes of prayer, besides the obvious, taking your concerns to the Lord, is the ability that we can have to remind ourselves of what God has promised and what God has said; and not just intellectually or theologically, but taking those truths and applying them to real life situations. That's really what prayer does in many ways. It takes what we've learned and it applies this to what we're going through. This is a prayer of compilation. David's greatest hits. But he was a man after God's own heart.

We have mentioned to you a couple times, and I mention it to you again because you see it in the first three verses, that David's relationship with God was one of understanding. He knew the Lord well, the character of God, and that helps when you go to pray. And we pointed out in a couple of the Psalms that David refers to God by lots of different names that God uses for Himself to reveal Himself to man as to His character and to His heart towards us. And there are three basic ones that you find in the Psalms. I'll mention them to you again if you weren't here the other weeks. The word "LORD" all in capitals is the translation of four Hebrew consonants. It is either going to be pronounced Yahweh or Jehovah. There's no vowels to help us to do that. But it is God's favorite name for Himself. He takes it to say to us, I'm a God you can count on. And whenever He makes a deal, makes a covenant, makes a promise, He uses this name of Himself to say, My word is good. And so God wants us to trust His word; that what He says we can count upon. The word "Lord" without the capitals, just the "L" being capital, is a translation of the word Adonai, and Adonai just puts the Lord in a place of authority. I'm the boss, you're not, applesauce; you know, that thing. He's in charge. But it does leave us in a

position of humility before Him, and you find it here as well. And the term just "God," G-o-d, for the most part in the Psalms is the translation of the word "Elohim." Elohim is a name that God uses when He talks about His creative power. But it is used by man to just speak of God's power, as evidenced in the fact that He made everything.

So a covenant God, a Lord over all, a powerful God. David knew Him to be such. And because of the character that he knew of God, David finds himself able to come and bring his concerns to the Lord. It's good that you know the Lord well yourself.

The other thing I would mention before we get started is -- well, I guess we've started. Before we continue -- the other thing that stands out in the Psalm is nowhere in this prayer does David go out of his way to tell God how to fix things. There's not -- it's not an instructional prayer to how to solve his dilemma. Instead he comes to the awareness that what he wants to do more than anything else in this situation is come out the other end knowing God better. He figures God will handle the problem, but I want to know the Lord better. I want to come through this thing with flying colors. He wants to be -- in fact, he'll say it at the end of the Psalm, I want to be a witness to my enemies and to those who should be ashamed that they had plotted to kill me.

Verse 1, and you knew we'd get there, "Bow down your ear, O Lord, and help me; for I am poor and needy." Help me because I am poor and needy. I think that ultimately prayer has that intention. We want to make the Becoming One, the Jehovah, the Lord of Promise, the One who makes covenants, we want to know that He hears our concerns; and that He is moving to eliminate or to alleviate them. We want God to shake the heavens and to move the earth. We want God to be angry on our behalf, and to go before us to pave the way. It is a cry of our hearts. And David starts off by saying of himself, I'm poor and needy, but You are eternal and powerful. And he asks God to humble himself.

The words "bow down" is almost Lord, come down to my level and help me, being poor, in desperate straits. And you get this picture from the Holy Spirit of a cry of the weak on the one end of the line and the Earth-shaking God on the other. Lord, if you could just condescend to where I am, where I live, to what I'm going through. And David asks God to hear him while confessing he is weak and unable.

Now, that's not all he is going to say. He's going to say in verse 2, I'm holy, which literally means I'm yours. But he sincerely sees himself as weak. I think that there is probably no worse way of praying than using words of spiritual poverty and yet believing inside you have need of nothing. We see that sometimes. People, oh, they're so self-deprecating in their words, but in reality, they don't believe it themselves. Dependency will drive prayer's sincerity. Dependency will drive sincerity in prayer. If you really need God's help, it's not hard to say, "I need your help and I know that I do." And so David finds himself humbled before the Lord. God knows the difference. In fact, in most places in the Bible where you find a people or a nation saying, Lord, help us, we are in dire straits, you will read the words, "And the Lord heard their prayer." If it is driven by something other than that sincerity of heart, you might very well not see that. But God hears the prayers of those that are bowed down. He also hears their murmuring, but that's another study that we don't want to get into this morning at all.

So David is forced by a bunch of wicked men who would have gladly ended his life. Brutal, defiant, ungodly. They hated David. They would have killed him without hesitation. And David realized that he needed the Lord, that the problem was bigger than himself, but God was far larger than the problem. So Lord help me because I'm poor and needy.

Second of all, help me because I'm Yours. Verse 2 says, "Preserve my life, for I am holy; You're my God. Save Your servant who trusts in You." The word "holy" means to be separated for one purpose, and in the Bible it speaks about your life being given to the Lord. You've been bought with a price. You're no longer your own. So Lord, I'm in big trouble. Help me for that reason. And I belong to You. I've thrown in with You. You've made great promises to me. If You don't help me, no one will. And he asks the Lord to preserve his life. The word "preserve" means to guard. It's almost like a garrison that gathers around a fort. The New Testament equivalent would be the word "keep." Protect me. It's a picture of a defenseless individual who has a very large bodyguard, someone that is able to watch over them wherever they go.

Now, David specifically will ask that God will protect him from the evil of those who are making plans, but he doesn't want to stumble in the process. He doesn't want to waiver. God, help me. I belong to you. Now, I'm holy is not a proud

declaration of self-righteousness. It is a restatement of the fact that God said if we give Him our life, that we belong to Him. It is just a reminder that, look, you're messing with God's property when you mess with me. I might not be able to defend myself, but the God that I belong to can certainly defend me. And that's how David approached this violent kind of threat to his life. Guard me, Lord. I belong to You. Keep me, Lord, that no damage would be done to Your vessel, and save Your servant. Don't just protect me, save me and deliver me. For You are my God, Elohim. You're the power behind creation. You're the One who is able. And David declares his confidence in the One who keeps him and knows him.

Thirdly, verse 3, help me because I'm asking, or I'm crying out to you. "Be merciful to me, Lord, I cry out to you all the day long." This is more than a prayer of a guy who's on his way to donuts in the car and he throws up a quickie. This is a man who is in a relationship with the Lord. Help me because I'm poor and needy. Help me because I belong to You. Help me because I am crying out to You. All day long. The habit of his life was one of prayer. No settling in, no settling for other solutions. I want to hear from the Lord. There is something to be said in prayer for persistence. You can read it in the gospel, especially of Luke. There are two places separated by about seven chapters or so, Chapter 11 and Chapter 18, where God tells specific parables relating only to one issue: Persistence in prayer. And He makes the comparison between a human kind of inconvenience to respond and God's heart to want to help. The first story you remember was a fellow that was in bed at night with his family and the animals were in the house when a neighbor came over and started knocking at the door at midnight wanting some bread for an unexpected guest who had dropped by, and the Lord in telling the --, he said the friend yelled out, hey, look, don't trouble me. The door's shut, the kids are in bed. We can't get up now. We're going to wake up the whole house. And then he said, he wouldn't help you because he's your friend, but if you keep knocking, he'll get up. And he'll get up because you've kept knocking. And then the Lord said, how much more do you think your Father in heaven will get up? When you can even persuade someone who's a friend, but not so loyal to you, to move just by your persistence, how much more do you think persistence with God is going to help you in your situation? In Luke 18 He tells the story of the unjust judge who had a widow who had a need and she came. And it says he didn't concern himself with God or man. He was kind of a, an aloof guy who thought his own power was his own,

and he ignored her. And he literally said about her, she can't do me any good. Why should I give her the time of day? But she kept coming every day, every morning. Can you see me today? Can you help me today? And the Lord said he won't help because he's just -- he'll help because she won't go away. In fact, he will say of her, her continual coming wearies me. And then the Lord said again, Shall God not avenge those, His elect, who cry out to Him day and night, though He bears along with them? I tell you, He'll avenge them speedily.

So both of the lessons were the same, like you read of David. God wants you to be able to pray constantly, not because you need to convince Him you need help, not to bother Him into responding. That's the way the world works. But prayer in persistence is good for you. And you should know as you pray, God is anxious to answer. So if there's a delay, there's just something better going on than the answer. There's something that needed to take place first. Because His heart is to help and to respond. I cry to You all day. Help me because I cry to You always. In fact, the words "all day long" are in the present tense. Well, here's his confidence. "Rejoice the soul of your servant. For You, Lord, I lift up my soul to You. O Lord, for You are a good God, abundant in mercy to all who have called upon You. So give ear to my prayer, Lord. Attend to the voice of my supplication. And in the day of my trouble I'll call upon You. You'll answer me."

Verse 4 said, "Rejoice the soul of your servant," which I read to mean David wasn't so happy right now. He wasn't pretending to be something he is not. He wanted to have the right attitude as he went through these things. Lord, can you just give me joy? Even though there's no answer yet, it's not enough for me to just get through the trial. I want to be concerned in how I get through. And I think that's an important issue. Because it's kind of like faith. You know, faith is great and we're going to go to heaven, but once you get there, you don't need that faith anymore. You're there; right? So it's how you got there that really matters. Did you trust the Lord every day, just hanging on by the skin of your teeth? Same kind of thing in prayer. You know, there's trials in your life today. How you get through them is really important. It's important to others as they watch you, it's important to you in your walk with the Lord. Did you please God? Were you trusting Him when nothing seemed to be working out? How do you get through this thing?

So David without an answer says, Lord, rejoice my heart. I want to have a joy in You, even though I don't have an answer to prayer, because God, You're a gracious God. I should be joyful whether I get an answer or not, just because of who You are. You're merciful, You're longsuffering. The word "good" is the Hebrew word "tov." "Tov" means to be excellent in virtue or valuable in estimation. God, there's never a short supply of grace with You and mercy. In fact, he says in verse 5, "Abundant in mercy to all who call upon Your name." David is sure that God is glad to see him praying, that God will respond. In fact, prayer is kind of like living life in the boundaries and confines of where God has put you, depending on His promises. You surround yourself with what God has said. That's how you get through life. And if you'll follow those things, you'll get where God wants you to be.

If you've ever been to Venice, there is a small strip of stones that are laid into the streets and into the walls of Venice. In fact, Venice is like a maze. If you get off the beaten track or you get on a boat and go the wrong way, you can be there endlessly. But if you'll follow the red line, you'll end up in the center of town, in the piazza, where the church was, where the worship took place. You follow the lines, you'll get to worship. You get off on your own and, man, you'll spin around forever, and you won't really find where you're supposed to be. Prayer walks where God has spoken. It depends upon what God has said. And it will keep you on the right path. It'll keep your heart right as you go.

True prayer is kind of like catching in a mirror what God has said and then reflecting it back to Him with confidence. Here, Lord, You said this. So I want joy. You're a great God. And even though I'm under this terrible pressure, I want You to react appropriately. I want you to know that I trust You. And he even says in a couple of places, You abound in mercy. You know, sometimes when you go through trials, the first thing the devil will do is try to convince you you brought this on yourself. God doesn't love you so much, God is not for you so much. You know, oh, if you were right with God, He'd probably bless you, but look at you and this is what you deserve. But I read these words: God is ready to forgive. God is ready to forgive. If you buy into the lies of the enemy that God won't forgive, you should go back and read your Bible again. He's ready. He's ready. Well, I've done it 100 times -- yeah, He's ready. Well, I'm not doing -- yeah, he's ready. Well -- yeah, He's ready. Stop you in your tracks. He's ready. Abounding in mercy.

"So give ear to my prayer." And like verse 1, David here cries out again that God would listen to his prayer, but he prays it from the understanding of the God that he serves. In fact, he is able to conclude in verse 7 that God will answer my prayer. God will answer. Verse 7 is the confidence that came from verse 2 and 3 and 4 and 5, considering the God that he served. There's no sense in asking for help from someone that can't help you. But the only real place of effective deliverance is when you cry out and wait upon the Lord.

So here's David's desire of his own life. He says in verse 8, "Among the gods there's no one like You, Lord; there is none who do the work of Your works. In fact, all the nations that You have made will come and worship before You, Lord, and will glorify Your name because You're great, and You do wondrous things. You are God alone." There is none like You. That's a great attitude to have when you go pray. The gods of this world will not compare; the gods of flesh and pleasure and power and money. Oh, we give them names, but they gave them all names in the Old Testament, the idols of the days, but they're false gods. In fact, David says in verse 9 as he prays, "Even the most powerful nations on the planet made by God will one day be on their face before God." He's going to have the last words. How -- what a glorious day that will be. And verse 10, the works of God set him apart from everyone else. He's the creator. He's the Lord. He's the savior. He heals the sick and raises the dead and changes human hearts and promises eternity to all who will believe in Him. The words, "who does wondrous things" again is in the present tense. This isn't just something I'm looking back towards. This is something God does now.

So David's feeling a lot better before he ever gets to his prayer, reminding himself of all that God is and all that God has done. But here's his prayer before even the deliverance that he's longing for, "Lord, teach me your ways, that I can walk in your truth and unite my heart that I would fear Your name." That's his prayer. In verses 1 through like, say, verse 7 or so, David desperately is seeking for God's help, but having thought about the God he serves, who He is and what He does, David finds himself with an even more important agenda than deliverance, and that is, help me to walk with You. This will pass, but I want something that's eternal. I want to begin to walk with You and to know You better, and Lord, if You could just unite my heart.

The worst thing about our spiritual life is that when you are

distracted with divided loyalties, and then you don't see much spiritual action and you wonder why, the problem applies with us. You know, if you're here Sunday morning with a Bible in your hand and, you look like you're doing great, but you spend the rest of the week in the world and the Bible goes in the trunk, right where you'll be able to find it the next Sunday, and there isn't much of a relationship with God, you're living on both sides of the fence and you're trying to get by and you want God's blessing, but you don't necessarily want the devotion that's going to be required to find it, that's a divided loyalty. That's a hard road, if you will, to walk. But if you can just delight yourself in the Lord and know His ways. I don't want my way. I want you to teach me Your way. Unite my heart. I don't want to be distracted. Decisions without dedication leads to a weak spiritual life. The dedication has to be wrapped up into that whole equation. And the world wants you to be divided of heart, if you know the truth. They will say to you, well, all right, go ahead and worship, but don't get crazy about it. Or go ahead and pray, but let's be realistic. Or let's live by faith, but let's also use a lot of common sense. No, common sense is for me to trust God. But not the world.

When Ezekiel was sent by the Lord, I think it's in chapter 11, to speak to the children of Israel in captivity for their sin, the Lord said to them in not so many words, "I've scattered you amongst the nations of the gentiles, but I've made you a small island in their midst. And there is coming a day when I'll give you a new heart and new spirit which you can walk with Me. And a stony heart I'll take out of your heart and I will give you a heart of flesh." His promise was though they lived in the world and they were surrounded by it, He isolated them from the world around them by His Spirit, by His work. That's what God would want for us. David wanted that as well. So teach me Your ways, or I just want Your ways. I want to walk in Your truth. I want my heart on board with Your plans.

In fact, verse 12 is one of those willful decisions. "I will praise You, Lord my God, with all of my heart." You are Elohim. You are Adonai. I will give it all to You. And notice that his worship was not based on deliverance from the worry of verse 14; it is rather a worship that is driven by his knowledge of God, simply by faith. David was going to take steps to enjoy his understanding of God by faith, and leave the problems with Him, but not be overwhelmed by them so that he missed out on what God and who God was. In fact, in verse 2 David called the Lord "my God" in prayer; in verse

12 he calls him "my God" in worship.

Recalling the greatness of God, verse 13, "Great is Your mercy towards me. You've delivered my soul from the depth of the grave," or the depth of hell, if you will. Look, You've saved me for all of eternity. This isn't going to be so difficult.

Well, finally in verse 14, David turns to his concern. And he said, "O God, the proud have risen against me and a mob of violent men are seeking to take my life, and they have not set You before them." This is a rebellious work. That was his -- the reason we got to verse 1. That's the reason he fell on his knees to begin with, but look it, he sees things so more clearly and his relationship has been reviewed. His understanding of God's character and sovereignty reminded. He's considered the word that God has spoken. He's determined that one way or another, he's going to worship even when he has no answer yet or sees no deliverance. He's going to be wholehearted in his approach. And then he gets to verse 14. There's a lot God can do with you in prayer before He gets to answering it, and a lot that He wants to accomplish. But now he knows the problem looks far less severe, and God looks more awesome than ever. So he says in verse 14, look, the problem I'm having is with people. They're proud, they're violent. They're set upon destruction, my destruction. They don't consider You, but I will. They aren't moved by You, but I am, and they want to bring suffering. And then he said this: "Lord, I know that You're a God filled with compassion, and grace, and longsuffering and abundance and mercy and in truth."

Again, you're abounding in mercy. If you thought for one minute that the word "mercy" means not getting what you deserve. If David thought for one minute that this was going on because he deserved it, or God wanted to punish him for it, then he might very well turn away, but God is merciful. He doesn't give us what we deserve. He gives us grace. That's what we don't deserve. And David lived that kind of life. I get it. I get that everything I have and I get is by a gracious act of God, who has sent His Son to stand in that place where He can offer me mercy as well. I'm off the hook, if you will. I'm off the hook. But you, Lord, are a God full of compassion.

Notice the words "but you Lord." I'm convinced the last six or eight weeks as I've been going through Psalms that I'm going to do -- if the Lord tarries, I'm going to do a message next Easter on the message "But God." Now, if you go through

the Bible and you look up "but God," when it comes to a statement of truth or fact, and then you read "but God," there are hundreds of them. We could start a series on that and maybe end in Easter. I mean, there's just a lot of them. But I want to do that, unless the Lord tarries. So you if you don't like that message, don't come Easter. It's the one I'm doing. No, I'm kidding. Just come anyway.

Verse 15, by the way, is a verbatim quote from Exodus chapter 34, when the Lord was speaking to Moses at Mt. Sinai about His character and giving them the Law and His deliverance for them. "Here, stand on the Word"; that's literally what David said. Lord, I'm going to stand on Your Word to me. "So Lord, turn to me. Have mercy upon me." There's the third time it's mentioned. "Give strength to Your servant, and save the son of Your maidservant. And show me a sign for good, that those who hate me and see it may be ashamed, because You, Lord, have helped me and comforted me." David ends his prayer by asking for God's strength to stand in the face of this and to be encouraged. Give me a good sign that You're with me and You're working. In the end I want to be a good witness. I want to be a witness to my enemy. You might pray, I want them destroyed and dead, like, tomorrow. That would be -- amen, in Jesus name. Makes good sense. David went, I want to be a great witness so when they see Your hand upon my life and how I've handled this and trusted You, they are going to be ashamed that they went down this road at all. He wanted to be sure that God was honored through it all. Keep me going, Lord. Give me a sign for good. Encourage me along the way, but use my life so the wicked might be ashamed.

Good verses and lots to apply. I hope that the Lord will help in your prayer life as well.