



Psalms 85-86

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Tape #7193
By Chuck Smith

Psalm eighty-five was probably written after the return from the Babylonian captivity. It is to the chief musician and it is inscribed as a psalm for the sons of Korah. The psalm begins with thanksgiving to God for bringing them back from their captivity.

LORD, thou hast been favorable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob (85:1).

The acknowledgement that God has favored them in freeing them from that long period of captivity.

Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sins (85:2).

It was quite obvious the reason why the nation of Israel went into captivity was because of their iniquity and because of their sin. The prophets were constantly warning them that unless they repented and turned from their iniquities that they would be led captive into the nations. They did not repent and thus they did go into captivity. Now the acknowledgement that God is forgiven and that God has covered their sins.

Thou hast taken away all thy wrath: thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger (85:3).

It's interesting that he makes this statement and yet the next few verses are really sort of a cry unto God because there still seems to be a residue of anger or there seems not to be that complete restoration. After they came back from the captivity in Babylon through the decree of the Persian king Cyrus that they had begun the building of the temple under Ezra, Zerubbabel and Joshua. It was not easy living.

A lot of times when we go back to that special place of our childhood we find that it isn't anything like we remembered it. There are those things that are in our minds that are sort of dreams of "those were the days my friend, we thought they'd never end" and we go back and the house we used to live in looks like a shack now. Things are so different. We've developed in our minds sort of a scheme. We remember some important thoughts but we make up the rest and we fantasize about the rest and we build it up as a glorious home, it was big. You go back and realize it isn't all that you have conjured up to be in the years of intervening.

So when they go back to Jerusalem things were really a mess. They didn't expect that it would be as bad as it really was. It was hard, it was tough and it was not an easy life. Thus they became demoralized and discouraged. Later on, when Nehemiah was the cupbearer to Artaxerxes and some fellows had come back from Jerusalem they said, "How are things in Jerusalem?" It was a dream of all kids. He'd never seen it but he had heard about it from all of the ancients and they said, "It is a mess. It's really bad. The people are discouraged and demoralized". It wasn't all glory days when they returned from captivity. It was tough.

The judgement of God for their sin has been accomplished and fulfilled. The fierceness of the anger of God against the people that brought their captivity is over. Yet they have not come into a full position of blessing, of that they once knew.

Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease. Wilt thou be angry with us for ever? wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? (85:4-5).

Lord, are we going to have to endure this kind of hardship from now on? So the plea is for God to turn again in blessing upon his people.

Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee? (85:6).

God bring new life. That “revive” is always the sense of bringing new life to your people.

Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation. I will hear what God the LORD will speak: (85:7-8).

When Habakkuk was complaining to God before their captivity because of the corrupted conditions of the nation. The Lord informed Habakkuk that he was aware of what was going on, he was ready to take care of it, he was going to use the Babylonian army as his instrument of justice and judgement and that they were going to destroy Jerusalem. Habakkuk said, “I don’t understand that. Why should you use a more evil nation to destroy your people?” Then he said, “I will go into the tower and I will wait to see”

Here the psalmist offers his prayer to God that God will again send his salvation. That God will revive them that they might again have that rejoicing in the land. God would show his mercy.

I will hear (85:8).

I’m going to listen. I think that there is an important part of prayer that we often times miss. That is, that waiting upon God to listen to his voice. So many times when we pray we bring so many issues before the Lord. We ask the Lord to show us, we ask the Lord to guide us, we ask the Lord to help us and then we never wait around to hear the answer. I think that many times God would answer if we would just wait awhile. We say, “Lord I don’t understand this” and then we get up and we leave and we are out the door. God hasn’t had a chance to respond. I think that there is an important time of having presented my complaint as the psalmist did and making my plea as the psalmist did. As the psalmist did, I wait to see what God’s going to say. I wait for a response. I wait for an answer.

I have discovered something rather interesting in prayer. That is, when I asked God direct questions, if I wait, God quite often will give me a direct answer to the direct question. I have learned to ask the question and then wait upon God for an answer.

I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: (85:8).

God’s word to us are always words of peace. God wants peace with you. God has provided a basis for peace with you and the basis for peace is through the work of Jesus Christ.

For he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to his folly (85:8).

It was their folly that brought them into captivity. It was their folly that brought them the judgement of God upon the nation. So God will speak peace but let them not turn again to the folly that brought them to that place of judgement.

Surely his salvation is nigh [near] them that fear him; (85:9).

In Romans chapter ten verses nine and ten Paul, speaking about salvation, said to not think it’s unattainable or that you can’t reach it. It’s somewhere way off in the heavens so someone has to ascend to bring it down to us. He said, “Salvation is very close to you” even if you might be one of the rankest sinners in the world. I mean if you look at your past and say, “I am a mess”. It doesn’t matter how deep you’ve gone into the pit of sin, you are still very near to salvation.

“Salvation is very close to you. It’s really as close as your mouth for if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved”.

That's how close you are to knowing the power of God and the deliverance of God in your life. Just a breath away. Confession to God that I'm a sinner and I believe in Jesus Christ. He is your son, you've raised him from the dead. That's just how close salvation is.

Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land (85:9).

Then this beautiful scripture.

Mercy and truth are met together: righteousness and peace have kissed each other (85:10).

Where did mercy and truth meet? It met in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life". It isn't really justice to forgive the guilty, that is a miscarriage of justice. We often cry out today against the judicial system that releases guilty people into our society because of some technicality. You know they are guilty, they even confess to their guilt but they weren't told of their rights prior to their confession. So then they are released by the court of their judicial system. We cry out, "That's not justice. That's not truth. That's not fair". Justice demands the penalty be exacted for the crime.

Mercy is the forgiveness of the wrong. You cannot be merciful without there being a violation of justice and truth. Yet God is merciful and yet he forgives the guilty. "Mercy and truth are met together" (85:10). Where did they meet together? In Jesus Christ. For you see, the way that God could be merciful to you a sinner and still be just, which he must be because he is God, is that he takes the guilt of your sin and he puts it over on his son Jesus Christ. He in turn died for your sin, paid the penalty for your guilt so that through Jesus Christ, God could have mercy upon you and you don't have to pay the penalty for your own sin. Justice has been served because the penalty was paid through Jesus Christ. So "Mercy and truth have met together" (85:10).

"Righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (85:10). God is still righteous in his mercy and the righteousness and peace. I can have peace with God. I can be righteous before God through Jesus Christ. It's sort of a prophecy here. The fulfillment happened in the person of Christ where mercy and truth did meet and righteousness peace kissed each other.

Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the LORD shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase (85:11-12).

Remember back a little ways in verse five when the psalmist was saying, "Lord will you be angry forever? Will your anger continue out to all generations? Will you not revive us again? I will listen to what God is going to say. I know what God says will be peace to his people". So the confidence with which the psalm ends, "The Lord will give that which is good, our land shall yield her increase. There will be the revival, the restoration.

Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps (85:13).

A glorious psalm.

Psalm eighty-six is prayer of David. There's no real way to ascertain exactly when David wrote this psalm and what incident in his life may have prompted this prayer. In verse seven he says, "In the day of trouble" and man David had nothing but trouble. His life was so filled with trouble that that doesn't give you much of a clue but it is a prayer of David.

BOW down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: (86:1).

A plea for God to listen.

for I am poor and needy (86:1).

Now notice in the first part here he makes a lot of little petitions and then he gives sort of a reason for the petition. Lord I want you to hear me now because I am poor, I am needy, I am in need Lord. Listen to me. I want you to hear me Lord.

Preserve my soul; for I am holy: (86:2).

This must have been early in David's career because in the earlier part of his career he did feel like he was getting a bum rap. He was getting worse than what he deserved. Late on in life he realized that he was getting better than he deserved and he wasn't pleading "I am righteous" or "I am holy" in his later life. So this definitely belongs to the earlier part of David's career.

*Preserve my soul; for I am holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee.
Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily (86:2-3).*

The petition is to be merciful unto me for I cry unto you daily.

Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul (86:4).

He has this little petition and then "for" and he gives the reason why he wants God to do it. The interesting thing is though, we don't have to give God reasons, and we usually like to. We usually like to feel like we somehow deserved the answers to our prayers and we so often are appealing to God on the basis of "I've been doing my best to be good" or "I've tried Lord, real hard". We often times make our appeal to God on the basis of our righteousness or our goodness. I used to when I was young. Like David, when I got old, I make my appeals totally on the grace of God. "Lord help me because you are so gracious. Lord bless me because you are so good". I come to God on the basis of his grace, his mercy, his goodness and his love. David came pretty much on the basis of "I am poor and needy, I am holy, I cry to you daily and I lift up my soul to you". Then he goes on.

*For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them
that call upon thee (86:5).*

Now there is a very grave error that many people make concerning God and concerning the Bible. They talk as though the Bible teaches that there are two gods: the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament. Because of the judgements that came upon Israel and the wrath of God that was poured out upon their enemies, people often see the God of the Old Testament as God of wrath and judgement and fire and brimstone. Then in the New Testament, because of what Jesus tells "God so loved the world" and he speaks of God's love, God's grace and God's mercy they see the God of the New Testament as very kind, very patient, very tenderhearted, very merciful and very loving and they say, "I like the God of the New Testament. I don't care much for the God of the Old Testament".

That is a misreading of both Old and New Testaments. Here in the Old Testament notice what the psalmist is saying. "Lord, you are good, you are ready to forgive, you are plenteous in mercy" (86:5). "But you, O Lord, are a God full of compassion and gracious, longsuffering and plenteous in mercy and truth" (86:15). That's the God of the Old Testament. The same as the God of the New Testament. The God of the New Testament is also a God of righteous judgement.

"For the wrath of God will be revealed against all unrighteousness and all ungodliness of men who hold the truth of God in unrighteousness. For when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful. Their foolish hearts were darkened professing themselves to be wise they became fools".

It goes on and talks about the judgement, the wrath of God, that shall be revealed.

“Therefore let us take the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard. Blessed anytime that we shall drift away from them for if the word spoken by angels was steadfast and every transgression received a just recompense of reward. How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation that was delivered unto us. For we know him who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord. It is a fearful thing to fall in the hands of the living God”.

Those who think that the God of the New Testament is all love and forgiveness, kindness and sweetness and universal salvation. For everybody better read Revelation six through eighteen when the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. Oh yes he is both. He is a God of love, he is longsuffering, he is full of compassion, he is merciful, he is gracious and thank God for that. But also he is a God of righteous judgement and for those who rebel against him and set their heart against him there is coming a day of God’s judgement. Who will be able to stand?

For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee (85:5).

Those that don’t call don’t receive.

Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee; for thou wilt answer me (86:6-7).

Jeremiah thirty-three says that “In the day in which Jeremiah was in the prison or in the dungeon the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah saying “Call unto me and I will answer thee and show you great and mighty things”. The interesting thing is you read the thirty-second chapter, he had been praying all night and in the morning and he spoke saying, “Call unto me and I’ll answer you, show you great and mighty things”. Here he says “in the day of trouble I will call and you will answer”. That’s always a glorious thing to realize that in the day of trouble I could call upon the Lord and the Lord will hear me and the Lord will answer my prayer.

Among the gods (86:8).

Notice the little “g”, the elohim.

there is none like unto thee, O Lord; (86:8).

The Bible recognizes that there are many things that people worship. Whatever you worship is your god. In the Old Testament they worshiped pleasure, that was their god and they named it Molech. They made their little idols to represent Molech. They burned incense to Molech. In order to appease or to gain the favor of Molech they even sacrificed their babies in the fires. They burned them, cremated them, in order to somehow gain the favor of their god Molech, their god of pleasure.

There was Baal, men ruled by their intellects, worshiping their intellects. Can you see people today worshiping their intellects? I’m amused by them. I think always of what Shakespeare said, “Man, poor man, so ignorant in that which he knows best”. Those who profess to know so much that they like to be called professors. Interesting isn’t it. I’m a professor, I profess to know a lot, “Man, poor man, so ignorant in that which he knows best”” The vast amount of knowledge that could be known, the surface has only been scratched by man. Yet people worship the intellect. They worship these other gods.

As I was mentioning this morning, they were closer to reality and life, they were more honest, and they realized what we don’t realize. That is if pleasure is your thing then pleasure is your god. If you live for pleasure then that’s your god. Now because you don’t make an idol and because you don’t do incense and

because you don't kneel before it and go through the rituals it still is the god of your life. Your whole life is built around pleasure, you are constantly looking for some new kick and your life is spent in the pursuit of the thrill and the excitement, the moment of sensation, the rush, that's your god. There are no gods like the Lord. All of these things; power, money, possessions and pleasure, none of these gods could really satisfy the deepest need of your life. They may be great to live with but none of them are good when you are really in trouble.

The children of Israel were always turning to these other idols, these other gods. Finally God said, "Look am tired of this. You worship and serve these other gods and then when trouble comes you call upon me. From now on when trouble comes you call upon the gods you've been serving. See if they will deliver you". They might be fun to live with but man they're sure no fun when trouble comes.

When your baby is dying and medical science can't do anything for it and all of those exciting experiences you had in the pursuit of pleasure seem rather empty in face of eternity of your only child. You feel how empty it is and how desperate you are, that is when a person reaches out to the true and living God. We know there is no god like the true God, the living God. Though we may be serving and worshiping these other things, that you have been serving as you pursued through life the material things and the money and the whole bit, when it comes to death and you realize none of these things are of any value, they can't help you at this point. All of the money in the world can't give you another day. That is when you want to know the true and the living God.

Listen, I've discovered that the true and the living God is a great one to live with too, not just to die with. It's tremendous to live with the true and living God. To be in fellowship with him is the most glorious thin in the world and it's the biggest lie of Satan to say, "You don't want that until you die. It is no fun". That is just a big lie of Satan. Living for the Lord has to be the most exciting, thrilling experience that one could possible know.

Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works (86:8).

These guys can't do any works.

All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name (86:9).

This is announcing the day when the true Lord will be recognized by more than just the Nation of Israel. I think that this particular prophecy even goes further. I think that this particular prophecy is tied to that which Paul declared in Philippians chapter two verses nine and ten. Paul is speaking of how that...

"Jesus who is in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God yet humbled himself and came in the likeness of man as a servant obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God is highly exalted him, given him a name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess".

All nations who thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name (86:9).

At the name of Jesus "every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father". They are tied together so you might want to put a little note in Philippians two ten and eleven. Also in Psalm twenty-two, which we know, is a psalm of prophecy concerning Jesus. It is the psalm in which is death by crucifixion is detailed for us. Many of the things during the crucifixion like the piercing of his hands and feet, the parting of his garments and the casting of lots for his vesture, all these are

prophesied here in psalm twenty-two. He goes on to say in verse twenty-nine, “All they that be fat upon the earth shall eat and worship and they that go down to the dust” that is those that have already died, “shall bow before him. Every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess.

One further passage that you might want to put together with that is Isaiah forty-five verse twenty-three. Again, that prophesy of the universal acknowledgement of Jesus Christ and of God. The Lord declares “I have sworn by myself. The word has gone from my mouth in righteousness and shall not return that unto me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear”. The confession is that Jesus Christ is the Lord. As the psalmist said, “They will glorify thy name”.

For thou art great, (86:10).

There is no God like thee O Lord, for you are great.

For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone (86:10).

The others are false gods. There is only one true and living God, there are many false gods.

Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: (86:11).

Oh how I want God to teach me his way. How I want to walk in his truth. Now the heart of the petitions.

unite my heart to fear thy name (86:11).

Give me Lord an undivided heart. One of the biggest problems that we face today is that divided heart. There's a warfare that goes on within us. The flesh against the spirit, the spirit against the flesh; the two are contrary. My flesh is being pulled by the world in which I live. A strong pull, the world is attractive, the things of the world are attractive. Many times we find our hearts being divided. A desire for God and purity and yet the flesh lusting after the things of the world. So the psalmist is saying for God to give him an undivided heart. I want a heart only for God, to the things of God.

I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore. For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell (86:12-13).

I deserve the lowest hell but thank God he's delivered my soul from the lowest hell. Interesting thing about hell in Luke sixteen. It was the soul of the rich man that was in hell and his body was in the grave. We read that there was a certain rich man who fared exceptionality well every day and there was a poor man that was brought daily and laid at the gate. He's full of soars, the dogs came and licked his soars and he survived off of the crumbs that were tossed to him from the rich man's table. The poor man did and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and in hell lifted up his eyes being in torment. He saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus was there being comforted by Abraham. He cried to Abraham and said, “Father Abraham have mercy on me and send Lazarus over here with some water. I'm tormented in this heat”.

There was a consciousness, the soul. “Son remember in your lifetime you had it good and Lazarus had it tough”. The soul, the consciousness was there through the body of the man was in some sepulchre, some tomb, and probably an ornate tomb since he was a rich man. They probably buried him with a lot of pomp and all in an expensive tomb. The body was being eaten by the limestone. The soul, the consciousness was in hell, in the deepest hell.

O God, the proud are risen against me, and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; and have not set thee before them (86:14).

Probably a reference to Saul who was pursuing David and who had risen up against David. His men were pursuing David through the mountains, seeking out to destroy them. These men who had not set the Lord before their hearts.

But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid (86:15-16).

The beautiful prayer of David. Now you see he is coming to God not on the basis of “I am holy”. Now he is going to be receiving. He’s coming to God on the right basis. Don’t come to God on the basis of your holiness or righteousness. You might get what you deserve. Come to God on the basis of “Lord, you are full of compassion, you are gracious, you are longsuffering and you are full of mercy and truth.

O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, (86:16).

There are these pulls from the world, the things of the world.

give strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid (86:16).

These guys are out to get David. They were all spreading these viscous lies about them.

Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast holpen [helped] me, and comforted me (86:17).

Lord just something special that they’ll all see so that they’ll know that I have not lost your favor. That you have helped me. That you are my help, my comfort and my strength. Let them see it Lord.

We didn’t quite make eighty-seven. So next week we will start with eighty-seven as continue through. Psalm eighty-eight, if you can get through that one, that’s got to be the most mournful psalm in the Bible. Most of the psalms, as we pointed out earlier, start off on a down-beat but they end up on an up-beat. You start out all discouraged but as you are praying God encourages your heart and you come out of it. “I know God will give me victory. I know that God is going to triumph. We shall yet sing praises to thee”. In this psalm the guy never got that far. He ends on a downer. He never got out of the pit.

I think that there are sometimes that we are in the pit so deep that we can’t find our way out. It’s good to know that others have been in that pit too. When it is so deep that you can’t be consoled or helped or comforted. That seems to be where the psalmist was in eighty-eight. Bare your weight through that one. We won’t spend too much time with it because I don’t like to stay in the pit. We will try to go through eighty-nine next week.

Now we pray and ask God’s blessing to be upon your lives as you go forth in the strength of the Lord to be His witnesses in this world. May God, by His Holy Spirit, guide your life and give you His word of wisdom. May you experience the joy of the consciousness of the presence of God as He shows His tokens for good, His grace and His compassion upon your life. God bless you and be with you as we continue our pilgrimage looking for the glorious return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.