

REFLECTIONS ON THANKSGIVING!

Psalm 86: 1-17 woven and quilted with Psalm 138: 1-8 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson
With many stories of God’s miracles in mission trip to Nigeria, Nov. 2-17, 2012

I smile as I see you all this Thanksgiving Sunday. To see you is to know in my soul how I have longed for you all while I was in Africa. I missed you all very much. As I was coming back from Lagos, Nigeria, I somehow had it in my mind that I had given my secretary, Judy Odogwu information for today’s bulletin that I would be preaching today on Psalm 86:1-17. So I studied Psalm 86 on the way home from Lagos, Nigeria to Houston, Texas, on my 13 hour flight across the Atlantic Ocean. But when I arrived yesterday morning in Houston, I called home to make sure of my text. Already the bulletin read that I was preaching on Psalm 139: 1-8. I smiled again as I had been studying Psalm 86. I knew it was braiding time, so I am going to quilt together the two psalms, taking my introduction from Psalm 86: 1-17 and then the body of this message from Psalm 138: 1-8.

I am so thankful to be home with you all. The mission trip to Nigeria has been one of the most blessed mission trips, but not a day went by without a deep sense of warfare in the spirit, spiritual warfare. As Psalm 86: 2 declares, David was praying fervently, “Do preserve my soul, for I am a godly man. O Thou, my God, save Thy servant who trusts in Thee.” Whatever David faced, it was continual warfare in the spirit. In verse 3, David continued, “Be gracious to me, O Lord, For to Thee, I cry all the day long.” David’s experience was mine on these fifteen days gone from you all. I know the intensity of sensing every day, as in verse 4, “For to Thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul.” Perhaps there is a sense for all of us that this psalm is our daily psalm, but there is also a truth that in certain situations, our spirit is on “red alert.” That was true for me every day in Nigeria. When we see God deliver us, as David cried out to God in verse 12, we can say, “I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and will glorify Your name forever.” Why? Verse 13 gives the answer, telling the deep reasons David had, which I echo today, “For Thy loving kindness toward me is great, and Thou hast delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

I don’t know why God originally allowed me to be studying Psalm 86: 1-17 as my Thanksgiving message when I had clearly given my secretary Psalm 138: 1-8. What I do know for certain is that before I left home and traveled to Nigeria, the Lord placed strongly on my heart, Genesis 28: 15, God’s word to Jacob, which became God’s voice to me. “And behold, I am with you, and will keep you

wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” Today on this 2012 Thanksgiving Sunday, I want us all afresh to know that God’s Word to his saints in the Scripture is often used by His Spirit to zero in on our own individual lives to become for us, His individual Word to us. As His Word is forever settled in heaven, we can count on God’s Word, His changeless character and His omnipotent power to do for us what He has done for others. Paul wrote in Romans 15: 3, “For whatever was written in earlier times, was written for our learning/instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope. The hymn writer, Stuart Hamblen in 1950 wrote words that are biblically on target when he wrote, “It is no secret what God can do, what He’s done for others, He’ll do for you.” I saw those kinds of miracles in Nigeria as God did for me what He has done in ages past for others.

May God use these meditations and reflections on David’s intense prayer and praise in Psalm 86 to woo us into a closer walk with our Lord Jesus Christ. In Psalm 86, I closely observed ten times when David cried out with two words, “O Lord.” There is something intense about praying or praising with these two words on our lips and our hearts—“O Lord.” Songs like “Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul,” find their intimate birth in Psalm 86: 4, where we read, “Make glad the soul of Thy servant, For to Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.” The awesome hymn, “Teach me, Thy way, O Lord,” has its genesis in Psalm 86: 11 where we recall David praying, “Teach me, Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth, Unite my heart to fear Thy name.” The words of the hymn writer B. Mansell Ramsey in 1919 are “Teach me Thy way, O Lord, teach me Thy way! Thy guiding grace afford—teach me Thy way! Help me to walk aright, more by faith, less by sight; Lead me with heav’nly light, teach me Thy way!” Whenever we pray using these two little words, “O Lord,” or praise Him with “O Lord,” there is an intimate connection of us with the Lord, if we are His redeemed children. Be assured, I have prayed and praised with these two awesome words, “O Lord,” more than I can say since I left for Nigeria on November 2nd.

Psalm 138: 1-8 braids and weaves and quilts into Psalm 86: 1-17 beautifully as as Psalm 138: 8 ends with “The Lord will accomplish what concerns me; Thy loving kindness, O Lord, is everlasting.” For a few moments this morning, I want to camp on Psalm 138: 1-8. I want to explain why I today can echo David’s word in Psalm 138: 1, “I will give thanks with all my heart, I will sing praises to Thee before the gods.” In this psalm I have eight reasons why I want to lead us all today in giving

thanks to the Lord. I hope this message and these Nigeria stories are sufficient for us all to echo David's praise and thanks to God! But why?

I WILL GIVE YOU THANKS, O LORD, BEFORE ALL the honored gods BECAUSE YOU ALONE ARE GOD. (I.)

How beautifully verse one weaves into Psalm 86: 8, 10 which declare, "There is no one like Thee among the gods, O Lord; Nor are there any works like Thine...For Thou art great and doest wondrous deeds; Thou alone art God." Night before last, Friday night on the way home, I sat in Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos Nigeria. I sat down beside a man named Bruce Findlay. He wanted to talk. He is the area sales manager for Europe and West Africa for his company, Grant PrideCo, an oil well drilling company centered out of Aberdeen, England. Speaking with Bruce, a 58 year old man originally from Denmark was easy as he did most of the talking. All the while we were conversing, a man from Houston, Texas, was seated fifteen steps away from us, and he was listening intently. Wherever I have gone on mission trips, I have always witnessed of Jesus. Bruce has a god that I was singing praises to God in front of. You may not guess his "god." He grew up in Denmark going to a Congregational Church. His last attendance there was as a 15 year old lad, a teenager when he got irritated at the pastor. Since then Bruce's "god" is atheism. I was singing praises to God as I told him of hundreds coming to know the Lord on this trip to Nigeria, even as Bruce was telling me there is no God. Bruce was in the right place by God's design, but I told him he was at the wrong gate. I was in Gate D-34 going to Houston, while he needed to go to D-44 going to Amsterdam and on to England. Before Bruce got up to leave, I asked him if he had a Bible at home. He informed me he was sure there was a Bible in his attic in Aberdeen, but that his whole marriage and rearing of his children had been without a Bible. I challenged him to read the Gospel of John one more time, now 43 years later. He actually promised me that he would get down his Bible from the attic and read the Gospel of John. Then I prayed with Bruce. As he left, he asked me if I would pray for him. He said, "Pastor, you can pray for me. I know you know I need it." I rejoiced to plant the seeds of the Gospel in his life before the false "god" of atheism. Can you imagine believing in a "god" that requires that use the name of God to define him?

As Bruce Findlay walked away, a 41 year old Nigerian, Chuck, pronounced Chuk, with a long "u" walked into the waiting area where I was seated. I asked him, "Do you know Jesus as your Savior and Lord?" Chuck Awa replied, "Yes, I know the Lord Jesus personally. He lives in my heart. Hallelujah!" This second conversation got the best of the man overhearing the conversations. This man from Texas came

out of hiding and sat down almost in my face. Eugene Iloka, a recently retired Texas corrections officer, came up to talk. He said, "I have heard all your conversation with Bruce Findlay. I can even tell you why his name is spelled with an "lay" rather than an "ley." I laughed. He had heard everything. He continued, "Can I interrupt you and Chuck. I listened to you as you witnessed to Bruce about knowing Jesus personally. And just now I heard you say, Chuck, that you personally know Jesus. Help me. I am a devout Catholic and I believe everything you have said. Just help me find God personally. I want to know Jesus as you and Chuck do." What frosting on the cake this was for me! Eugene Iloka has a son who was a star football player last year for Boise State University on one of the best teams in the nation. This son, George Iloka was selected by the Cincinnati Bengals in the fifth round of the 2012 NFL draft, 167th overall. George Iloka signed with the Bengals on May 10, 2012. As I was praising and thanking the Lord before the 'gods,' which are no gods, Eugene Iloka was listening. After introductions, I walked Eugene through the Word showing him it was possible for him to know Jesus personally. He got on the same huge United 777 I did, and he sat two seats ahead of me on the Lagos to Houston bound flight. He boarded the plane as my new brother in Jesus, # 261, as well as I can count, of the trophies of God's grace that He granted to me on this Nigerian journey, a capstone of Thanksgiving for me.

I WILL GIVE THANKS, O LORD, BECAUSE OF THE

LOVINGKINDNESS AND TRUTH OF THE LORD. (II.) Notice verse 2 of Psalm 138. "I will bow down toward Thy holy temple, and give thanks to Thy name for Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth; for Thou has magnified Thy word according to all Thy name." Beloved, one of the major reasons God brought me to Nigeria was declare the amazing truth of the Trinity, God in three persons, and to explain it to many who cannot understand how God can be one God alone and yet three persons. The last thing I did before leaving Nigeria was to warn one pastor there about never denying the truth of God's three-in-oneness. There are many cults and groups in Africa that deny who Jesus is and they also deny the three-oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One very popular man who has captured the hearts of tens of thousands of Africans denies that Jesus always was. This man predicted Jesus would return in 1977. He is a false prophet. The false prophet claims he is the final Elijah to come. I know that God allowed me to tremble at the Word of the Lord and to magnify His Word before the gods. This one particular false prophet has mixed occult practices to heal others. Jesus said in John 14: 6, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Nigeria is perhaps the Bible Belt of Africa. The brands of Christianity

there include signs everywhere declaring Jesus is alive and exalting signs, wonders, miracles, new revelation, “Holy Spirit ambushment,” and halos and pillars of fire above the heads of men purporting to authenticate them though they are false prophet. I thank God for your prayers. What a joy was mine to magnify Jesus and His holy Word as the final revelation of God to man.

I WILL GIVE THANKS, O LORD, FOR BOLDNESS IN PRAYER AND PREACHING. (III.)

I read in verse 3, “On the day I called, Thou didst answer me; Thou didst make me bold with strength in my soul.” When I arrived at customs in Nigeria, it was blazing hot there. I made it through, sweating all the way with fans blowing. Sweating is normal in Nigeria. Every message I preached, my shirts were soaked with perspiration. With customs over, I waited over an hour to find my luggage. Then proceeding to the front of the airport, two ladies with official Nigerian clothes on, stopped me. They asked me for my yellow medical card. I had none and was truthfully told that these cards are no longer needed. The law used to be that all visitors to Africa must have malaria and yellow fever shots and be able to produce evidence of the same. I was surprised by this request. Being a foreigner in a country where English is the official language sounds workable. Honestly, the spoken languages are Hausa, Ibo, Yorriba, and a brand of pigeon English I cannot understand. The ladies took me to their armed leader. AK-47’s are pervasive all over Nigeria and very persuasive in making anyone know that those people carrying them mean business. This man told me that because I had no medical card, they were shipping me back to America on the return of that massive Boeing 777 to Houston. I prayed quietly to the Lord, but boldly. Then I reached out to this armed manager of yellow medical cards and I said, “I am going to pray for you.” I prayed, “Dear Father, this man is just trying to do his job well. Bless him for that. I came to Nigeria to preach Your Word. I had no idea I must have a yellow medical card. Please allow me to fulfill Your will in Nigeria and not return today to America. I pray this in Jesus’ name, Amen.” When I finished praying, the man with his arm motioned me, saying twice, “You go, man of God!” I was never more happy to comply. Thanks, Lord, for making me bold, when fear wanted to reign.

I WILL GIVE THANKS, O LORD, WHEN KINGS OF THE EARTH HEAR YOUR WORD THROUGH ME. (IV.)

Psalm 138: 4 declares, “All the kings of the earth will give thanks to Thee, O Lord, When they have heard the words of Thy mouth.” The Lord allowed me to go to four Nigerian states, Ogun state, Lagos state, River state, and Imo state. I rejoiced to hear Pastor John Ogu preach a number of messages. Never think you have long winded preachers. His first

message was two hours and twelve minutes and another message was three hours and thirty-five minutes. Be assured, at our longest here in America, your pastors are servants of God with short messages even when they are 45 minutes long. Pastor John Ogu is a tribal king and he was present to hear me preach five of my messages. It was my honor to preach before an earthly king who truly is not only a pastor and superintendent of over 100 churches, but who also is my brother in Jesus. We fellowshiped much together. To be with a king, to go visit his Peace Palace in the village of Ununamu was a treat last Thursday. We held hands in his kingly court and prayed for each other. It was a unique experience. Pastor John on several occasions told me, “You have taught me something today my brother, and your messages are all so simple, even a child can understand.” How I praise the Lord to have preached the Word of the Lord before this king!

I WILL GIVE THANKS, O LORD, AND SING WITH KINGS FOR THE GREAT WAYS OF THE LORD AND THE GREATNESS OF HIS GLORY.

(V.) Notice verse 5, “And they (earthly kings) will sing of the ways of the Lord. For great is the glory of the Lord.” Pastor John Ogu is a king who is a fine singer. Their song book at Camp Bethlehem where thousands attended and hundreds came to be saved and many hundreds came to rededicate their lives to Jesus, their song book features almost every song I ever knew growing up in the Kentucky hills. The people rejoiced when I sang at times in my messages. I was singing their songs and they would stand and sing with me as I sang songs like, “Stand By Me,” “There Were Ninety and Nine,” “Jesus, Use Me, O Lord, Don’t Refuse Me,” “Sweep Over My Soul,” “Shut In With God,” and “Living By Faith.” These Nigerian believers sing and clap in a manner most of us may have never heard. It is like thunder with blasts on a trumpet and saxophone, and home-made drums of every fashion. It is awesome praise to the greatness of the glory of the Lord.

I WILL GIVE THANKS, O LORD, THAT YOU ALLOWED ME TO MODEL SERVANTHOOD BEFORE THE NIGERIANS.

(VI.) Psalm 138: 6 declares, “For although the Lord is exalted, Yet He regards the lowly; But the haughty He knows from afar.” There isn’t a caste system in Nigeria as there is in India. Nevertheless, just as there are “untouchables” or Dalits or OCB’s in India, in Nigeria, servants do servant’s work and there is a clear demarcation and separation. I simply cannot abide this separation so I refuse to fit into it. God allowed me to bond with many lowly servants. Don’t ask me how it happened, but in Pastor Wally’s home, one son in law of Pastor John Ogu, we talked about food and I offered to make them Kentucky biscuits and gravy, eggs and bacon. After

that breakfast which they loved, they asked me to cook. You don't have to ask me twice to cook. I love to cook. When I cooked, I cleaned up, did dishes, swept the floor, and when they protested, I said, "Cook's privilege." I invited the servant Isaac and his wife Engozi, (Blessing) to eat with us. God used this cooking and cleaning to open doors for me to counsel many servants who do the hard work, carry everything on their heads, and pack heavy loads. Before my eyes always were the words of the Lord, in Mark 10: 45, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." God let this special dream in my soul come true in also getting to wash feet while in Nigeria. Praise the Name of Jesus!

I WILL GIVE THANKS, O LORD, THAT YOU PRESERVED MY LIFE IN DIRE SITUATIONS. (VII.) Psalm 138: 7 goes on to say, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me; Thou wilt stretch forth Thy hand against the wrath of my enemies, And Thy right hand will save me." I traveled on terrible roads at speeds unheard of—at 90 to 100 miles an hour (not kilometers) and I sometimes was on stretches of roads that were impossible situations to get through—(going 100 yards might take up to a half hour) and with many military police check points. Impossible driving in the crowded cities, it felt like we were playing dodge ball with our cars. These are streets with open sewers on both sides of the street and millions walking. Lagos has 15-25 million, the largest city in Africa, and other cities I was in included, Abuja, 7-8 million, the capital of Nigeria, Port Harcourt, 2 million, the capital of River State, and Owerri, the capital of Imo State, 1 and 1/2 million. I saw many tragic accidents. The military is all over seated in police trucks openly carrying AK-47's that most often lay across their laps and are pointing towards the vehicle behind them, often me. I come to you this morning to declare that both physically and spiritually, Jesus Saves.

After getting a text message on my phone that I was warned I would be kidnapped, thankfully Pastor John Ogu and his son in law, our fast driver, Thomas Sede, a banker, hired a mobile military policeman, Adams, to accompany us from Port Harcourt in River State to Ununama in Imo State, where we visited Pastor John's Peace Palace. At the check points, when the police saw Adams, they waved us through, praise the Lord. God gave me boldness and courage to witness to many Muslims. One man in Port Harcourt International Airport, Siddiq, is high in rank in Nigeria. God gave me boldness to speak to him. He in turn after rejecting my witness loudly, took me to meet his friend, an Anglican pastor who has been witnessing to him before me. I thank God for being able to sow the seed of faith in

Siddiq's life and I pray he will turn to the Lord. On that last Friday early morning flight from Port Harcourt to Lagos, the enemy tried every way, it seemed, to postpone my coming home. Two times, my tickets were changed saying I would not be returning for two more weeks. Finally, as I showed a TSA equivalent officer my passport, I was walking in the hot African sun to the plane. The first order of business is that you must identify your luggage or you cannot board. On the long walk out to the plane, the prince of the power of the air sent an air strike. A bird I never saw overhead dropped his large bomb on the boarding pass I carried in my hand. My boarding pass was now colored green and gray and white and I was chagrin to hand it to an agent for the plane. There to help me was God's answer, Gloria, a Christian lady who works for AERO Airlines. She had earlier helped me with resolving the ticket mix-up. She smiled as she delicately removed the worst lower portion of the ticket where the bomb had hit as the bird made a perfect strike. On the plane, a lady named Bridget was in my row. She told me, "You were bold to talk to Siddiq. I was praying for you. I also know Jesus." Again I remembered as I told her about the air strike, what I John 4: 4 declares, "Greater Is He that is in you than He that is in the world." Lastly,

I WILL GIVE THANKS, O LORD, FOR YOU ACCOMPLISHING YOUR PURPOSE IN ME, EVEN AS YOU PROMISE TO DO THE SAME FOR US

ALL. (VIII.) Finally, notice Psalm 138: 8. "The Lord will accomplish what concerns me; Thy lovingkindness, O Lord, is everlasting; Do not forsake the works of Thy hands." I was led of God to go to Nigeria for three main reasons, beyond the fact that we now have over 40 Nigerians going to our church and you, Judy Odogwu, are my secretary. (1) **I went to evangelize.** One of my favorite tasks for God was in the afternoons, what I came to call "Bakery Evangelism," in Pastor Wally's wife Julia's Bakery—The Otito Bakery and Confectionary." Franca Okere and Olayinka Oyebanji gave me 8000 Naira to spend on the trip. Franca gave seven and Ola gave one. I would get the eight 1000 Naira bills changed into 50 and 100 denomination Naira. When men and women and young people came in to buy bread for 100 Nair, I gave them another 100 Naira for another loaf of bread. It led every time to witnessing to many unsaved folks including Muslims. From the experience, two men were saved, Joseph John, age 24, and David Ayinde, a night club worker who came to Jesus, even after one of hundreds of times when all the lights went out for 10 minutes as they do all over Nigeria. In the dark, he came to see God's light. (2) **I went to shepherd.** God gave me simple shepherding messages that He deeply used. Along with 261 people coming to Jesus, many hundreds more rededicated their lives to Jesus. (3) **I went to counsel.** I cannot tell you how many

times I shared regarding rearing children. I prayed with single folk about God bringing them a husband or a wife. I counseled with many couples who are barren and prayed with them for God to open the womb and give them children. I counseled wives and husbands about husbands ceasing from beating their wives, a common sadness and reality in Nigeria. I counseled and warned 86+ pastors about staying strong in sound doctrine. That's my abbreviated initial story this Thanksgiving Sunday. Thy lovingkindness, O Lord, is everlasting! May we be faithful to the Lord and not forsake the works of our hands. I love you all. Amen.