

I have titled the sermon “Between Sheol and the Temple”
because that fits well the location of Psalm 86 –
it also fits well our own situation in life – in two different ways.

If you think about it in terms of the surface of our lives,
it is often our lived experience:
the grave – Sheol – haunts our steps;
we experience suffering – we experience how things are *not* as they should be –
but we live in the hope of the holy Temple where Christ is.

I think this is the way we often approach a Psalm like Psalm 86.
Psalm 86 sounds very much like *my* experience.

But Psalm 86 is titled “a Prayer of David.”
It is not first and foremost about *our* experience,
but about the experience of the Son of David, our Lord Jesus Christ.
He is the one who has passed through death and Sheol
and he is the one who has ascended to the heavenly temple.
Therefore as he is the singer of the Psalm,
who has now passed through Sheol to the Temple,
we sing Psalm 86, remembering that God *was* faithful to Jesus’ prayer,
and so Sheol *no longer* haunts our steps
(death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory?)

Sheol – the grave – is in our past,
as we have been united with Christ in his death,
and buried with him in our baptism into his death.
And because we have been united to Christ,
we are being built together in him as a holy temple
where God dwells with his people.

Psalm 86 is the only “prayer of David” in book 3 of the Psalter.
It has been placed squarely in the middle of the Psalms of the Sons of Korah.
God put it *here* in *this part* of the Psalter,
and therefore gave it a relationship to the Korahite Psalms.

As we have seen, book 3 of the Psalter is largely taken up with the themes of exile and lament.
There is a sense in which Psalms 73-89 are a response to Psalm 72.
Psalm 72 concludes Book 2
with a ringing statement of God’s promises to the Davidic king.
Book 3 then focuses on how those glorious promises are not yet visible.

The Sons of Korah reflect on this in Psalms 84, 85, 87, and 88.

Psalm 84 is an expression of longing for the temple.

Blessed are those who dwell in your house.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in tents of wickedness.

But Psalm 85 has shown us – the reality is far different!

God’s anger has burned against us.

When will God restore us?

Next week we will see how Psalm 87 celebrates the city of God.

And the following week Psalm 88 will bury us in the depths of Sheol –
the depths of the grave.

Psalm 86, then, puts us “between Sheol and the Temple.”

The Temple represents the heavenly presence of the living God.

Sheol signifies the underworld – the grave –
the place of the dead.

It is a “Prayer of David” – not so much because David was the author

(he may have been – but that’s not the point) –

but because David is the speaker.

In the midst of Asaphite and Korahite Psalms, this one Psalm is placed in David’s mouth.

One key to the Psalm is the use of the word “hesed” –

translated “steadfast love” in verses 5, 13, 15.

The emphasis in all three uses are of God’s *hesed* – his steadfast love.

God is faithful – he is loyal to his covenant –

he does what he says he will do.

But in verse 2 the Psalmist says that I am *hasid* –

hesed is the noun –

hasid is the adjective.

So when the Psalmist says “I am *hasid*” (translated “godly” in the ESV),

he is claiming to be characterized

by the same sort of steadfast love/covenant loyalty

as the God that he worships.

You may have heard of the “Hasidim” – a mystical branch of orthodox Judaism.

This is where their name comes from.
They are claiming to be “godly” “pious” – covenantally faithful.

Psalm 86 says that the singer is *hasid* – he is loyal to the covenant.

But even more central to Psalm 86 is the self-identification as “your servant.”

Verse 2 – “save your servant”

Verse 4 – “gladden the soul of your servant”

Verse 16 – “give your strength to your servant
and save the son of your maidservant.”

This connects back to Psalm 78:70

where David was portrayed as the servant (*ebed*) with a heart of integrity.

Likewise in 86:2, 4, 16, the Psalmist calls himself God’s servant,
and possessed of an honest heart. (see v 11)

This connection between God’s *hesed*

and the Son of David as the servant (*ebed*)

also connects forward to Psalm 89

which will close book 3 with four references to David “my servant”
and will emphasize God’s steadfast love forever.

God is faithful to his loyal servant.

While I hope that you are *hasid* – that you are loyal –

I do not recommend that you put yourself at the center of Psalm 86.

I certainly make a lousy Messiah!

And I do think that much of you, either!

So the place where we need to start is with Jesus, the Son of David,

as the *hasid*, the faithful servant – the son who is the center of Psalm 86.

A note on the outline:

There are three stanzas in Psalm 86:

the first stanza focused on requests to God “because” (for)

but concludes with confidence

the second stanza then gives thanks to God

and speaks of the universal worship of God that will result

the third stanza then returns to the problem

but also concludes with confidence in God’s steadfast love.

1. Hear Me, Lord, and Answer Me because of Your Steadfast Love to All Who Call on You (v1-7)

The “ki” to the first stanza is the word “ki” – which means “for” or “because.”

It appears six times in the first seven verses.

You’ll see it in every verse except verse 6.

(The ESV did well to keep it consistent as well – always translating it “for” in this passage).

There are *reasons* why God should listen.

In verses 1-4 there are four requests for God to listen – each followed by a “ki”

86:1 *Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.*
2 *Preserve my life, for I am godly;*
3 *Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all the day.*
4 *Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.*

Notice that the first two reasons have to do with who I am –

I am poor and needy

I am godly (or faithful to the covenant).

The next two reasons have to do with what I do –

I cry to you all the day

I lift up my soul to you.

In the middle of these four is a plea without a “ki”

save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God.

Here at the heart of the opening to Psalm 86

the Psalmist identifies who he is – “your servant”

and who God is – “you are my God.”

It is precisely because this is first true of Jesus that we can sing this as well!

Because *he* is the servant –

because he is the poor and needy one who cried out to the Father –

therefore we can come to the Father in his name.

Verse 5 is the one verse where the “ki” comes at the beginning of the sentence.

So while there were four reasons why God should answer *me* in verses 1-4,

all of those reasons were focused on who “I” am.

Verse 5 is all about who God is.

Ultimately, God should answer his covenantally faithful servant

because *God himself* is a covenantally faithful God:

*5 For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.*

We've seen this word "good" now in the last three Psalms.

84:11 – "No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly"

85:12 – "Yes, the LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase"

86:5 – Why? "For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you."

You might almost think that these three Psalms were written (or at least placed here)
in order to trace these themes through!
(And whatever the authors or editors were trying to do,
certainly God put these here for us to see!)

But if you read Psalm 86 quickly, you may miss another important point.
What *name* does Psalm 86 use for God?

Lord.

In verse 1, 6, 11, and 17 we hear the name Yahweh (LORD – all caps).
But in verses 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, and 15,
we hear Adonai (Lord) – translated "master" or "sovereign."

It is especially interesting in verses 5 and 15,
both of which highlight the revelation of God at Sinai –
the place where God revealed himself as Yahweh.
But here the Psalmist identifies his covenantally faithful God
as Adonai – my Lord, my master, my sovereign!

While it is important that I am poor and needy.
It is certainly relevant that I am *hasid* (that I am faithful),
the centrally important truth is that God abounds in *hesed*.

And that he abounds in steadfast love "to all who call upon you."

As we see in verse 6 – the Psalmist roots God's faithfulness *to me*,
in this central affirmation of verse 5 that God is faithful *to all who call upon him*.

*6 Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace.
7 In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me.*

The God who is faithful to all who call upon him

will certainly be faithful to me – because I am calling upon him!

Verses 6-7 close the first stanza with three requests:
give ear to my prayer, listen to my plea, I call upon you –

for (there's the ki) you answer me.

Why do you answer me?

That was what we saw at the heart of the first stanza in verse 5 –
because you are faithful to “all who call upon you.”

And of course, if Psalm 86 is a “prayer of David,”
then this prayer for God’s faithfulness to David
is a prayer that God would do what he promised in Psalm 72 –
that God would establish David’s seed,
and build up his glorious kingdom.

Verses 8-13 then state the Psalmist’s confidence in the reality of that kingdom.
All nations will come to worship God (72:11, 17 and 86:9)

2. The Nations Shall Worship because of Your Steadfast Love toward Me (v8-13)

In the first stanza, Yahweh appeared at the beginning and the end of the stanza.
Here the name of Yahweh appears only in the middle (verse 11).

There are two “kis” in this stanza (verse 10 and verse 13).

Verses 8-10 open this stanza by reflecting on who God is and what he has done:

8 There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

*9 All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.*

10 For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God.

Adonai is unique.

None of the elohim – none of the gods are like him.

Neither do they do works like yours (v8).

And because you are great and do wondrous things –

because you alone are God –

therefore,

all the nations you have made shall come and worship before you.

So while the story of redemption is an Israel-centered story –
it is a David-centered story –

the *purpose* of this story is to bring all nations before the Lord.

But how does this story get to the nations?

How will the nations hear?

How will the nations come and worship the Lord?

This is the burden of the second half of the second stanza (verses 11-13).

If verses 8-10 focus on the greatness of God's deeds to all,

then verses 11-13 focus on the greatness of God's deeds *to me*.

11 Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth;

this is the language of wisdom – of Psalm 119 –

teach me your way, O Yahweh (note here the Name of the LORD)

that I may walk in your truth.

That I may walk in your *emet*.

Psalm 85 concluded “Steadfast love and faithfulness meet.”

Hesed and *emet*.

This is the word for “faithfulness” or “truth” –

it can be translated either way.

I might suggest that we render it “faithfulness” here for consistency.

Teach me your way (your path)

that I may walk in your faithfulness.

Let me resemble you!

Not just outwardly –

but in the way – in the path – that I walk.

I am *hasid* – I reflect your covenant loyalty – your steadfast love –

I also desire to walk in your *emet* – in your faithfulness.

unite my heart to fear your name.

The verb here “unite” is simply the verbal form of the number one.

Make my heart one!

Unite my heart to fear your name!

This word “to unite” is only used three times in the Bible.

In its other uses, it is translated “to join” and it refers to joining with others.

Here, however, it expresses the desire that I *not* be double-minded.

That my heart would not be divided.

Unite my heart – make it one – make it whole –

to fear your name.

Psalm 85 had said that “his salvation is near to those who fear him.” (85:9)

The son of David believed that!

And so he prayed that God would unite his heart to fear his name.

Psalm 86 is undoubtedly a prayer of David – a Christ-centered Psalm –
but it is no less applicable for all that!

Indeed, it is *only* because God heard Jesus and united his heart
that we can have any hope as we sing these words as well!

Our hearts are so easily divided –
we so easily become double-minded –

that we need Jesus to cleanse us and renew us,
so that we might say:

*12 I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
and I will glorify your name forever.*

We give thanks and praise to God *whole-heartedly*
because Jesus has glorified the name of the Father –
and because the Father has glorified the Son in his exaltation,
with the glory that he had in the beginning before all ages!

Why?

Here’s the ki!

*13 For great is your steadfast love toward me;
you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.*

Because you rescued me – because you delivered me from the depths of the grave –
therefore I give thanks to you!

You have been faithful!

Your steadfast love endures forever!

Why do I say this?

Because you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

If you look at the structure of the second stanza,
you see that this is the reason (ultimately)
why the nations will worship God.

The nations will worship God because God does wondrous things.

What wondrous things does the only God do?

He delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

When God raises the Son of David from the dead,
then the nations will worship God.

It sort of sounds like NT history...

You might think that we should stop there.
But verse 11 goes back to the problem!

Why?

Because while you *have* delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol,
the nations do *not* yet worship and glorify your name.

In other words, the third stanza of Psalm 86
fits rather well with the post-Pentecost situation of the Son of David.

There are other ways you could hear verses 14-17,
but I want you to hear verses 14-17 as Jesus' prayer for you –
as Jesus' prayer for his body, the church!

God has rescued his life –
but now (verse 14) a band of ruthless men seeks my life:

**3. But Put to Shame Those Who Seek My Life, because You Abound in Steadfast Love
(v14-17)**

*14 O God, insolent men have risen up against me;
a band of ruthless men seeks my life, and they do not set you before them.*

*15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

*16 Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your maidservant.*

*17 Show me a sign of your favor, that those who hate me may see and be put to shame
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.*

If you think about the original horizon of this Psalm,
you can see how the prayer of David is not just about himself!

When God is gracious to David – when God is faithful to David's son,
then all of God's people (and indeed all nations) will be blessed!

Psalm 86 is a prayer of David –
but it was designed to be sung by the people of God –
it was designed for the worship of God’s holy church.

And insolent men *have* arisen against Jesus.
A band of ruthless men seek his life –
while they cannot reach him anymore,
they can go after Jesus by going after his people.

Verse 15 reminds God why this is a problem:
Adonai is a merciful and gracious God,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness –
abounding in *hesed* and *emet*.
This again reminds us of what God said to Moses at Sinai,
when he revealed himself to his servant.

And this emphasis on the Son of David as the Servant of God is the heart of v16
Turn to me and be gracious to me.
Verse 15 just said that God is gracious –
you are a gracious God, so be gracious to ME!
Give your strength to your servant.
You often hear that no one had figured out that the Servant and the Messiah were one.
Well, no one except the author of Psalm 86!

And note that he does not merely ask for strength.
He asks for *your* strength.
Give *your strength* to your servant,
and save the son of your maidservant.

This reminds us of Psalm 80 – with its emphasis on “the son whom you made strong for yourself”
“the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself.”

In Psalm 80, it was the people of God who sang,
praying that God would strengthen his Anointed.
Now, in Psalm 86, the Anointed One himself, the servant of the LORD,
prays that God would give him “your strength.”

And finally, in verse 17, he asks for a sign.
Not just any sign, but a sign of your favor,
That those who hate me may see and be put to shame.

Jesus prays that those who hate him would see this sign and be ashamed.

Why?

Here is the final *ki*!

Because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me!

Because you have helped me,
because you have comforted me,
therefore I pray that you will show me a sign –
but not a personal sign – this is a very public sign,
that those who hate me would be put to shame.

It is because the Father has raised Jesus to his right hand –

because of the resurrection of our Savior –

that's pretty good help!

And from that help, we can also take comfort,

Because, as Paul told the Athenians

“God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness

by a man whom he has appointed;

and of this he has given assurance to all

by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31)

The resurrection of Jesus is the sign of God's favor to Jesus.

And because Jesus sits at the right hand of God

we have confidence of God's grace and favor to us.