

An Undivided Heart

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 January 2025

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Well, please turn back to Psalm 86 as we continue our reflections on this part of the Psalter. Well, let me also just say a warm welcome to those who are new today.

I've seen a few new faces, so that's great. I'll get a chance to say hi to you after the service, if I may. That would be great as well. Well, I'm sure many of you will agree with me, but citizens around the world, I think, prefer their governments to be strong and stable.

Correct? Yes. Putting aside dictators, we don't want any of those. We don't want our rulers to be weak, but to stand up for us, to uphold justice.

And when the nation is threatened, to stick it to the bad guys on our behalf. And so here, we have King David being just such a king, right?

Remember David and Goliath. And that was even before he became a king. But at the height of his reign, David had an expansive kingdom.

[1 : 10] And the nation of Israel, because of his influence, enjoyed peace with its neighbors. And yet, here we have today in Psalm 86, which is a psalm of David, quite a totally different picture, don't we, of David.

Someone who is weak. Someone who is in distress. Now, we're not quite sure when it's written, but most likely, given it's in book three, it was at a time when he was ruling.

So, how are we to read this psalm? What are we to make of it? Was David really insecure deep down? Was he just faking his strength to his subjects?

Is there imposter syndrome? Well, let's delve into the psalm to consider. And as I said, I think the key to this psalm is to realize that it's being written by David.

It's a psalm of David, as it says in Attire, a prayer of David. And so, David here is praying in his role of king. And as we shall see, as a servant of God.

[2 : 22] And this was something that David had already dedicated his life to doing, even before he became a king. So, going back again to the time of David and Goliath. When he fronted the Philistines, what he said in 1 Samuel 17, verse 45, was this.

You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

So, he knows that what he's doing is in the name of God. He's a servant of God. And as we read in the opening of the psalm here in verse 1, it is clearly evident as well.

For he says, So, twice here, he refers to himself as God's servant.

And his posture is that of humble dependence. Hear me, for I am poor and needy. Save your servant who trusts in you. And then in verse 4, Bring joy to your servant, for I put my trust in you.

[3 : 40] That's a language of dependence on God. And so, what we see here is that David's not just appealing to God just because he's God, but because he is God's servant as well.

And he as God's servant is humbly depending on God to help and save him in his role as God's servant. And so, he calls out day and all day long in distress.

And as we now look from verse 5 onwards, we see the premise for David's faith and trust. That's the second point in your outline. The question is, where does David's confidence lie that God would save and help him?

Well, firstly, it is in God's loving and forgiving character. Verse 5, You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you.

It is tempting, isn't it, when things go wrong in our lives to look at others or our situation as the source of the problem? But that's not where David first looks, is it?

[4 : 45] Instead, he considers that actually he might be the problem as well. And as such, he seeks forgiveness and mercy. Even if I'm wrong, is what David effectively prays.

Even if I'm at fault, save me anyway and forgive me, even though what is happening may be in part due to me. So, David firstly appeals to God's loving and forgiving character, but then he also relies, secondly, on God's consistency to respond.

So, in verse 6, he prays, Hear my prayer, Lord, listen to my cry for mercy. When I am in distress, I call to you. Why? Because you answer me.

Now, I'm sure you have many come across this. Some of you may not have been working for that long, but some of you may have. And you probably know bosses in your life that just, you know, that will say at first, you know, if ever you need any help, come to me.

I'm, you know, I'm at your service. Just, my door is always open. But then, when you really need their help, they're the kind of bosses that never quite follow through, do they?

[5 : 57] Because either they're too busy, or actually they don't really care. They just want to look like they do. But that's not the case with God, is it? As God's servant, David knows God will respond whenever he's in need or in distress.

Now, we'll see why David is distressed shortly, but for now, we sense the intensity of David's desperation. We've already read how David has called on God all day long, pleading for mercy. But knowing God will answer, for he says, I call to you because I know, Lord, that you answer me. God is always faithful to those who serve him.

And so David knows that he will not be left in a lurch. But thirdly, not only because of God's forgiving character, or secondly, because of his constancy in response, thirdly, David is assured to know that God will save because he has the power to do so.

And so he breaks into a hymn of praise to God's might in verse 8. Among the gods there is none like you, Lord. No deeds can compare with yours.

[7 : 08] All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord. They will bring glory to your name. For you are great and do marvelous deeds. You alone are God. You know, God may desire to help and save, but it's no use to David unless God also has the power to do so, right?

And King David knows that God has that power. He also knows that there may be strong and mighty foes around him. For there were other nations around that were more numerous than Israel, had greater firepower, more chariots, more armies to overwhelm her.

And yet God, David knows that God is the master that sits above all that. That he's the one who made all the other nations. And so even though they're more powerful than Israel, their gods that they worship are nothing but idols.

Because in the end, they will all answer to God and bow the knee to him. You see, there are those that allow the fact that they're God's servants, you know, anointed by God, to get to their head. You know, they might think, I've got the God of all creation behind me. So the rest of you, you better watch out. If you don't do as I say, I'll get God to come and smite you. And you know, sadly, we've seen leaders within the church, but also outside, that have this sort of perverted Messiah complex, don't we?

[8 : 40] That somehow that makes them untouchable because they're doing God's work. And then that gives them license, sadly, to do all sorts of horrible things.

And those who lead them allow them to do so because they think mistakenly that they must not oppose God's servant. Well, that's not David's attitude.

Instead, he combines knowing that he's God's servant, anointed by God, yes. And therefore, God will rescue and save him with that of a humble and dependent posture.

He recognizes that by himself, he is poor and needy. He's at God's mercy. And yet, at the same time, he knows that whenever he's in distress, he can call on God, who alone has the power to save him from his enemies.

That even the nations might be out to get David right now, that they too, one day, will all bow the knee in worship to God of Israel.

[9 : 41] And of course, over time, God has demonstrated this to his people Israel over and over again, hasn't he? Freeing them from slavery, from the mighty Egyptians, giving them the land of Canaan where the inhabitants, the original inhabitants were more numerous and mightier than they were.

And then, since that time, during the days of the judges, and indeed, during the kingship of Saul, David, and Solomon, rescuing them again and again from the face of the Philistines, Amalekites, and Amorites.

And so, it's possible, isn't it? No, actually, it's imperative that those who serve God, the king of kings, must still be humble and needy, just like David was.

He didn't allow the identity of his master and the fact that God has always come to his rescue to go to his head. Now, I'm sure we're not like megalomaniacs, but, you know, sometimes when we taste success in life or experience God's blessing, does it go to our head?

Or do we remain humble and still say, I am poor and needy? And if not for you, God, who saves and helps me, I am nothing.

[11 : 07] And if that's the case, and it ought to be, then trusting God is actually essential, isn't it? Because God alone, the one we trust, is the only one capable of marvelous deeds and salvation.

Well, David is already doing this, as we can tell from his prayer. And yet, in the next section, we are surprised, aren't we, to see that he continues to petition God to grow more and more in this.

He doesn't just want to know this in his head, or pray it, or sing it, but actually to live it out constantly in serving God. So, let's go to verse 11, where we hear his petition as God's servant.

He says, It's interesting that David could have asked for a number of things, to take his distress away, to ask God to just make it all go away.

But instead, his request here, his main request, I think, in this psalm, is to ask God to give him insight into his way, to learn to trust God more fully.

[12 : 33] Now, often we like quick resolutions to our problems, isn't it? You know, shortcuts, compromises, anything it takes just to make the thing go away.

But David's prayer here is, Teach me your way, Lord. Not take away my problems, but teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness.

He desires to do things God's way, even if it requires waiting on God, having faith in God's faithfulness. And for David, as a king, that means no shortcuts to justice, right?

No unholy alliances with other nations. No compromise on obeying God's commands. No flirting with idols of the other nations. And so that's what I think an undivided heart means.

Not just wanting to serve God, but wanting to do it His way. Fearing Him above all else, so that we obey His voice alone.

[13 : 37] And doing this, even when we face temptations and threats that so easily try and sway us, or distract us. David here wants to guard his heart from this.

Even though he's already prayed this, he wants God to make sure that he's undivided, single-minded in serving God. That there is no hypocrisy between his lips, which praise God, as he's just done, and what he does in his life.

That when he glorifies God and praises Him with all his heart, he's also able to do it in obedience in serving God. And all of this because he then says, he knows how much God loves him, verse 13, because David speaks of being delivered from death.

And here it's not clear whether this is a physical or metaphoric deliverance, or whether it's in the past, or he's so confident in God's faithfulness that he just expresses it in the past tense as though it's done.

But either way, when we get to verse 14, we see the perils that he's currently facing. For he says, arrogant foes are attacking me, O God. Ruthless people are trying to kill me.

[14 : 49] They have no regard for you. But you, Lord, are compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. Turn to me and have mercy on me.

Show your strength in behalf of your servant. Save me because I've served you just as my mother did. Give me a sign of your goodness that my enemies may see it and be put to shame. For you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

So, this situation here is likely, I think, what prompts the psalm in the first place. So, a lot of what is already said in the opening verses are repeated here.

The thing that we now know, more specifically, is the danger that David is in. But otherwise, the focus is still the same. The focus is still David praying as God's servant as he faces distress while serving God.

And here's where I want to reflect a bit more by looking at these verses on God's relationship with his servant. If you look closely again with these verses, notice with me how interchangeably David refers to himself and God.

[15 : 55] So, we read again, verse 14, ruthless people are trying to kill me, but who have they not had any regard for? It's you, isn't it?

God. When he pleads for God to mercifully show his strength, it is on David's behalf as God's servant. And just as he prayed at the start, David asked God to save him because he serves God. And then right at the end, David asked for a sign of God's goodness because that will show his enemies that God is on his side, that God is with him. So, if you take all these verses together, what it shows is that David sees himself as God's agent.

That what the enemies do to him, it's what they're also doing to God. And then when God acts against them, he acts through David, his servant.

Why? Because, as God's servant, David bears the name and reputation of God. To attack God's servant is to attack God.

[17 : 02] And God, in turn, wouldn't allow his servant to be put to shame because then his own honor and his own glory would be on the line. So, David's trust in God goes hand in hand with his appeal to save because he is God's servant.

Now, if you want to summarize the gist of the entire prayer, I think what David is asking is this. He's saying, Save me, Lord, because I'm your poor and needy servant.

Save me because I trust in you, the forgiving, faithful, almighty, and incomparable God. Save me, your servant, so that the world, including my enemies and your enemies, may see who you are and either they will be ashamed or they will praise your name.

So, David here is very much praying as God's servant. This is a prayer of David as the servant king.

Now, we're not kings like David, so how do we apply this psalm? It's very easy to go from this is what God promised David to this is what God promised us, but before we think about ourselves, I think the first and foremost thing to see is that actually there is a servant king that is greater than David and that he, Jesus, is the one to whom this psalm is most appropriately applied to first.

[18 : 35] That is, before we apply the psalm to ourselves, we need to apply this psalm to Jesus. And as we read it, can you see how closely it aligns with Jesus and his life?

Jesus, king, descendant of David, he's God's servant, isn't he, without a doubt. Yes, he's the divine son of God, yet on earth, he learned dependence on his heavenly father.

He put his trust in God. Jesus is fully divine, yes, but we mustn't ignore the fact that he's fully human as well. He chose, in becoming human, a path of weakness and humility to be poor and needy.

And he experienced all that David went through in this psalm. Did arrogant foes attack him? Yes.

Did they try to kill him? Yes. Did they have no regard for God's servant?

Yes. And as we read the Gospels, we see Jesus calling on the Father in prayer, in dependence and trust. He was not immune himself to distress and despair.

[19 : 53] And yet, Jesus also walked fully in God's way, his father's way. Of all the humans on earth, he alone had an undivided heart.

Holy dedicated to doing the will of the Father. He, in other words, is the perfect servant of God. He fitted this psalm to the T, perfectly.

And so, we catch a glimpse of this in that other reading that Asaph read in chapter 14 of Mark's Gospel in the Garden of Gethsemane. Because, humanly, knowing that he faced the depth of death, in that garden, Jesus prayed, didn't he?

He asked for the cup of God's wrath to be taken from him. And yet, he also prayed, not my will, but your will be done. As the divine son of God, Jesus knew what God's will is.

He knew that God's way is the way of the cross. There was no other way for God to save us. And yet, his human flesh pulled in the other direction and longed for some other way to avoid the pain of death.

[21 : 06] But Jesus' prayer was actually to maintain an undivided heart, to align his human will fully with God's divine will, and which he did, willingly, and then going to the cross afterwards, laying down his life for us.

And so, as a result, God did what David asked for the servant of God. He delivered Jesus from the realm of death. Yes, he died, but he did not remain there. He was delivered from it and raised up.

And that deliverance, that resurrection, is the sign of goodness, as Psalm 86 says, that God showed to Jesus so that all God's enemies are put to shame for resisting Jesus.

It is because of Jesus' resurrection that all nations will praise the Father for his marvelous deeds. It is Jesus' obedience that has brought glory to the name of the Father.

And so, I hope you can see that first and foremost, this psalm is fulfilled in Jesus. God answers David's prayer powerfully in his son, Jesus.

[22 : 17] Now, I'm about to then apply this psalm to us and after you hear it, you may wonder why I couldn't have gone straight directly from the psalm to us.

You know, why bring up Jesus? Well, I hope you can see how much richer this psalm is when you see the circumstances of the psalm fulfilled so clearly in Jesus. We see Jesus' humanity but also God's faithfulness to his servant Jesus.

But also, more importantly, just as importantly, by going through Jesus, we see how important Jesus is. God answers us in this psalm because we are in Christ.

That is, when we are trusting God in Christ, when we are serving God in Christ, then this psalm applies to us only because we are in Christ and not without.

It is important that we see it fulfilled in Christ so that we can then see it applied to us in Christ. And then, at the same time, because we know that this psalm is about Jesus primarily, we learn how to apply it rightly.

[23 : 29] That is, we don't need to focus on the fact that there are enemies attacking us and foes because that was specific to David and Jesus. But rather, we can learn dependence on God whatever the circumstance, whether we have enemies or not.

and we can apply the request of having an undivided heart not just in times of despair but in all circumstances because that's what's required for God's servants.

So, having said that, let's apply it. So, the first thing to say is that because this psalm is about Jesus, then the first thing to be is not to be an enemy of God.

that is, if you are still resisting God's chosen servant Jesus, don't. Jesus is the one whom God has appointed to do his will, who trusted fully in the Father.

God raised him from the dead so that all nations, including each of us, will praise his name. And so, you and I, all of us, let's come to this servant of God, not resist him, but actually follow him, praise him, and give our hearts fully to him.

[24 : 42] But for those of us who already believe in Jesus, then let's be encouraged by the example of Jesus. Know that like David and Jesus, God desires his servants to have an undivided heart.

In fact, it's not possible to serve God any other way. Only God can do marvelous deeds, so why do we turn to anything else?

Money, friends, people of influence, modern technology, modern medicine, don't bother with them. Don't divide your heart by half worshiping God and then half having your eye to these things.

It does not work. Instead, our prayer should be, teach me your way, God. give me an undivided heart that I might fear your name.

Now, of course, I know that many of you already do that, that you earnestly desire to serve God wholeheartedly. And then sometimes, though, you feel guilty because you have so many other responsibilities in life that are pulling you away.

[25 : 42] And you think, is it still possible to have an undivided heart when we have all these other responsibilities? Sure, we're not chasing after these things, but they seem to be weighing us down.

Well, friends, if you find yourself in that situation, and I'll be surprised if you don't, because we all have things we need to do in life, whether it's work, studies, caring for family, or looking after other people, if that's your situation, then let me encourage you to see that serving God can be possible in and through every situation.

that is, if, for example, you are caring for someone as a carer, you can serve God in that role. If you're battling a major health challenge in life, well, ask God how you can serve God by facing this challenge, His way.

And if you're a student, then ask God to teach you how to study His way. You see, David's prayer is, teach me your way, God, that I may rely on your faithfulness.

Isn't it? It's not, teach me your way, God, that I may achieve great things for you. It's not, teach me your way, God, that I may use my spiritual gifts to show how good I am.

[26 : 58] No, teach me your way, God, that I may rely on your faithfulness. That means the way we serve God is to actually increase in our reliance and trust on God.

Whatever our circumstances we are in, we can ask God to show us how we may serve Him His way. And that is the way that brings glory to His name.

And that is the way that increases our trust in Him. And ultimately, that is the way that brings glory to Him through His Son, Jesus. As Paul says, as I conclude in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verse 31,

whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, Paul says, let us do it all for the glory of God.
Let's pray. Father, thank you for saving us through your servant Jesus Christ. Teach us now how we may serve you your way.
Teach us your way that we may rely on your faithfulness. Give us an undivided heart so that we may fear your name, that we may do so whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, that when we do it, we may bring glory to your name.
[28 : 25] In Jesus' name we pray.