

Psalm 86

Be Loving

Main idea: God loves His servants, His enemies, and all who call upon Him. We, who are made in His image, should do the same.

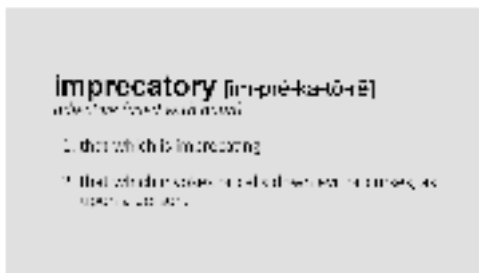
We've been looking at how God has given us emotions to be used for His glory. This morning, we're primarily going to be talking about God's love, but even as we talk mostly about God's love for us, I also want us to remember that God calls us to love as He loves.

Now, you might think that love is an easier emotion to talk about, especially since we've talked about how even emotions such as fear, anger, and sorrow can be used to glorify God. And as long as you stay fairly surface level, love does seem to be easier to talk about, but as soon as you go a bit deeper to talk about how love relates to judgment, especially God's judgment, you find that even love is far more awesome and even fearful than we usually consider.

To talk about God's love today, we're going to be looking today at Psalm 86.

Many of the Psalms are what we call imprecatory psalms.

[Definition of "imprecatory"]



"Imprecatory" is a word which here means, "that which invokes or calls down evil or curses, as upon a person." So the imprecatory psalms are songs which invite and even sometimes beg God to judge and show His wrath toward His enemies.

Now, the psalm that we're looking at today, Psalm 86, is not an imprecatory psalm, but it does share some things in common with the imprecatory psalms, namely that it ends with David asking God to bring his enemies to shame. And yet, the main theme of Psalm 86 isn't God's wrath, but God's love. We could outline Psalm 86 like this:

- I. David repents and asks God for grace (verses 1-4).
- II. David praises God for His steadfast love (verses 5-13).
- III. David prays for judgment on his enemies, in light of God's steadfast love (verses 14-17).

So I want us to ponder two questions this morning: 1) how does love relate to judgment, and 2) how are we to love our enemies, even in light of the fact of God's judgment?

Father, help us to rest in Your grace, knowing that we are saved only because of Your great love. And help us to extend that love and grace even to our enemies, and Your enemies, whom You love with a jealous love. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Psalm 86, verses 1-4.

A Prayer of David. Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am godly; save your servant, who trusts in you—you are my God. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all the day. Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. (Psalms 86:1-4)

So David begins this psalm with both repentance toward God, and faith that God not only hears him, but saves him. Although David was the king of Israel, he described himself as poor and needy. Jesus would later begin the Sermon on the Mount with these words:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)

Are you poor in spirit? In other words, do you recognize that your spirit is poor? That, spiritually speaking, you have no reason to boast in your ability to impress God or earn anything from Him because, as Paul wrote in Romans 3:23, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”?

And how far short do you believe you've fallen? In other words, how much of a sinner do you admit that you are?

Some Christians find comfort in how all of the law and the prophets depend on these two commands: to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.¹ And while that's certainly a great summary of the law, it's still the law.

How many of you have, all of your life, loved God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength? How many of you have, without fail, always loved your neighbor as yourself? So while summarizing the law and the prophets this way does simplify it, it doesn't make it any easier. We all fall far short. We fail to love.

I think most of us have looked at other people's mistakes and thought, “Well, at least I'm not like that, at least my kid isn't doing that, I'm better than that.”

[Picture of muddy kids]



¹ Matthew 22:37-40

See these muddy kids? They're all pretty messy, huh? But if you look close, you can see the one on the left has a cleaner shirt than the one in the middle. And the one in the middle has a cleaner face than the one on the left.

Now imagine that these were your kids. What would you do with them? You'd hose them all down before letting them back in the house, right? But what if they one with a slightly cleaner face said, "Oh, you don't need to hose me down, I'm not as dirty as these other kids." You'd probably hose him down even more to put him in his place, right? You see, that's what God thinks when He hears us thinking at least I'm not lazy, or judgmental, or like that other sinner. We may have our dirt in different places but we are all filthy without Christ's forgiveness.

So David prayed for grace. And David knew that God is gracious and merciful, so he would receive grace, and be forgiven of all his sins. We see this when David wrote in verse 2, "Preserve my life, for I am godly." Now, the very fact that David was praying for forgiveness shows that David didn't believe he was sinless, and yet he already trusted that God made him godly.

Did you know that you can have confidence in God to do what He's promised He would do? It's true! God is faithful!² When God's word says that you're saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ,³ believe it! God is trustworthy. And when the Bible calls you forgiven,⁴ redeemed,⁵ and a new creation,⁶ you can believe it because God doesn't lie.⁷ So walk in this truth by putting off the old self, and putting on the new.⁸ In other words, believe, like David did, that God makes you godly by His power.

Because here's the thing. You can get stuck on the truth that you've sinned and fallen short, or you can dwell on the truth that you're forgiven by God's grace so that you might walk a new life in Him. Both are true, but if you only ever dwell on your sin, then you'll never experience the freedom that you have in Jesus. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.⁹

Sometimes I get stuck thinking about how much I've messed up. I'm really very far from where I wish I was. I'm not the perfect husband, father, or pastor. I'm not. I've fallen short and continue to fall short in all of these areas, and so many more. I've even gotten so stuck in this way of thought that I've wondered if I'm even lovable at all.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved [me], even when [I was] dead in [my] trespasses, made [me] alive together with Christ.¹⁰ Because here's the amazing truth of the gospel: Romans 5:8.

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

² 2 Thessalonians 3:3

³ Ephesians 2:8-9

⁴ Psalm 130:3-4

⁵ Ephesians 1:7

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17

⁷ Numbers 23:19

⁸ Ephesians 4:22-24

⁹ Romans 8:1

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:4-5

And if God loves me, then who am I to say that I'm unlovable? That would be to disagree with God. Because even when we were at our worst, and even especially then, God still loved us and sent Jesus to die for us, so that we would be forgiven of all our sin.

In Psalm 51:7 David said, "Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." God can clean things up, he can make things new. He can fix it all. We don't have to stay covered in our sins.

You see, it's one thing to recognize that you're covered in mud, and it's another thing, an act of faith, to let God hose you down.

You see, David was confident of God's forgiveness, because he knew that God is love. Verse 5.

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you. Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer; listen to my plea for grace. In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me. There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name. I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol. (Psalms 86:5-13)

While it can also mean "the grave" or "death" in general, "sheol" is the Hebrew word that we often translate as "hell."¹¹ Apart from God's steadfast love, David's soul, and all of our souls, would be delivered to Sheol.

But it's interesting that David wrote as if he was already in the depths of Sheol, and that God delivered him out of it. We often picture hell as the place unbelievers go after this life, and that's true, but the Hebrews understood Sheol to be the place where unbelievers and anyone experiencing danger currently are. And if not for God's love, we would all be currently be in the depths of Sheol.

But God is love.¹² According to verse 5, God is good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on Him. Romans 10:13 says:

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13)

So, the question is, who will call on Him? Will you? And what does it mean to call on the name of the Lord?

The first time we read this phrase in the Bible is actually all the way back in Genesis 4:26.

To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD. (Genesis 4:26)

So picture what's going on here. Adam and Eve walked with God. They talked with God face to face. But when they were cast out of the garden of Eden because of their sin, their children and grandchildren had to be

¹¹ שְׁאוֹל is the only Hebrew word that's translated "hell." It's found in the Old Testament 65 times. The King James Version translates it "hell" 31 times, "grave" 31 times, and "pit" 3 times. The English Standard Version opts instead to not translate the word at all, leaving it as "Sheol" all 65 times.

¹² 1 John 4:8

content to hear about these stories from Adam and Eve, who were the only ones who had walked and talked with God.

So if your parents told you that they walked and talked with the God who created everything, but you personally never walked or talked with Him, what would you do? Well, you'd probably do one of two things. You could say, "Oh, you're making all that up! You're crazy! That's just a bunch of nonsense!" Or, you might begin to call on His name. You'd pray. In theological terms, you'd have faith.

So once again, I ask the question, will you call upon the Lord? Will you have faith?

You see, God is love not only toward David, but toward all the nations. Did you catch that? Verse 9. "All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name." As we saw last week, this kind of thing is repeated a lot in Scripture. You can go on our website and listen to the message from last week. But in addition to those, here are a few more.

Psalm 22:27

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. (Psalms 22:27)

1 John 4:14.

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. (1 John 4:14)

Revelation 7:9-10.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10)

Now, I've come to believe that these kinds of verses have often been majorly downplayed for many centuries by most Christians, including myself. We've said, or at least implied, that it doesn't really mean all the nations, but rather only some of all the nations. Like, we believe that God will save the United States, because "God bless America!" But do we also believe that God will save China? And North Korea? Will God save all the nations, or just some of the nations? And if so, how will He do that?

Well, I think the rest of Psalm 86 has the answer. Verse 17.

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. But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant, and save the son of your maidservant. 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. (Psalms 86:14-17)

David prayed for his enemies to be put to shame. So was David being unloving?

No. At least I don't think so. You see, I've come to believe that love is not the opposite of wrath. I think the opposite of love is something like apathy. And parents all know this. When your child disobeys, if you spare the rod, you spoil the child.¹³ So you show them wrath, not because you don't love them, but precisely because you DO love them, so that they might learn to obey, which is ultimately for their good. But if, when your child disobeys, you do nothing, like you just let them continue to play in the middle of a busy road, that's not love, because then they will learn to disobey as a way of life, and they will hurt themselves and others and even you.

So how should we treat our enemies? I'm sure most of you are familiar with Matthew 5:44-45. It says this:

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44-45)

Usually, when we read such verses, we focus on the command to love our enemies. But check out why it says we should love them: so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. In other words, we love our enemies because God loves His enemies. Before we trusted in Jesus Christ, we were called enemies of God. And check out how God treats His enemies:

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Romans 5:10)

God reconciles His enemies, us, to Himself. And He does that through the pouring out of His wrath on Jesus.

Romans 12:19-21.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19-21)

You see, God is love, but He's also a consuming fire. And this isn't a contradiction. Sometimes it's precisely through the fire that God shows His mercy.

David understood this. He prayed that his enemies would be brought to shame in the very same psalm that he himself prayed for forgiveness because he had been brought to shame. And this is the very same psalm in which David looked forward to all the nations coming and worshipping God together. So I don't think David prayed for his enemies to be brought to shame so that they would experience God's wrath forever, but rather so that they would experience God's wrath for a time, so that they would repent, and worship the Lord.

So I think what I'm saying is that it's good to pray that God brings his enemies to shame. It's good to pray for judgment upon China, and North Korea, and or unstable people who shoot others for whatever unjustified reason. But pray this way so that they might repent and ultimately experience the goodness and forgiveness of God.

Because sometimes it's precisely through the fire that God shows His mercy.

¹³ Proverbs 13:24

That's certainly true of the cross. God poured out judgment upon His Son, so that we would receive grace. Paul wrote, "never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God." The cross is where we see God's wrath. And it's where we see God's love.