

## PSALM LXXXVI.

**TITLE.**—A Prayer of David. We have here one of the five Psalms entitled Tephllahs or prayers. This Psalm consists of praise as well as prayer, but it is in all parts so directly addressed to God that it is most fitly called “a prayer.” A prayer is none the less but all the more a prayer because veins of praise run through it. This Psalm would seem to have been specially known as David’s prayer; even as the ninetieth is “the prayer of Moses.” David composed it, and no doubt often expressed himself in similar language; both the matter and the wording are suitable to his varied circumstances and expressive of the different characteristics of his mind. In many respects it resembles Psalm XVII., which bears the same title, but in other aspects it is very different; the prayers of a good man have a family likeness, but they vary as much as they agree. We may learn from the present Psalm that the great saints of old were accustomed to pray very much in the same fashion as we do; believers in all ages are of one genus. The name of God occurs very frequently in this Psalm, sometimes it is Jehovah, but more commonly Adonai, which it is believed by many learned scholars was written by the Jewish transcribers instead of the sublimer title, because their superstitious dread led them to do so: we, labouring under no such tormenting fear, rejoice in Jehovah, our God. It is singular that those who were so afraid of their God, that they dared not write his name, had yet so little godly fear, that they dared to alter his word.

**DIVISION.**—The Psalm is irregular in its construction but may be divided into three portions, each ending with a note of gratitude or of confidence: we shall therefore read from 1 to 7, and then, after another pause at the end of verse 13, we will continue to the end.

### EXPOSITION.

**B**OW down thine ear, O LORD, hear me: for I *am* poor and needy.  
 2 Preserve my soul; for I *am* holy: O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee.

3 Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto thee daily.

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

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

6 Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications.

7 In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.

1. “Bow down thine ear, O LORD, hear me.” In condescension to my littleness, and in pity to my weakness, “bow down thine ear, O LORD.” When our prayers are lowly by reason of our humility, or feeble by reason of our sickness, or without wing by reason of our despondency, the Lord will bow down to them, the infinitely exalted Jehovah will have respect unto them. Faith, when she has the loftiest name of God on her tongue, and calls him Jehovah, yet dares to ask from him the most tender and condescending acts of love. Great as he is he loves his children to be bold with him. “For I *am* poor and needy”—doubly a son of poverty, because, first, poor and without supply for my needs, and next, needy, and so full of wants though unable to supply them. Our distress is a forcible reason for our being heard by the Lord God, merciful, and gracious, for misery is ever the master argument with mercy. Such reasoning as this would never be adopted by a proud man, and when we hear it repeated in the public congregation by those great ones of the earth who count the peasantry to be little better than the earth they tread upon, it sounds like a mockery of the Most High. Of all despicable sinners those are the worst who use the language of spiritual poverty while they think themselves to be rich and increased in goods.

2. "*Preserve my soul.*" Let my life be safe from my enemies, and my spiritual nature be secure from their temptations. He feels himself unsafe except he be covered by the divine protection. "*For I am holy.*" I am set apart for holy uses, therefore do not let thine enemies commit a sacrilege by injuring or defiling me: I am clear of the crimes laid to my charge, and in that sense innocent; therefore, I beseech thee, do not allow me to suffer from unjust charges: and I am inoffensive, meek, and gentle towards others, therefore deal mercifully with me as I have dealt with my fellow men. Any of these renderings may explain the text, perhaps all together will expound it best. It is not self-righteous in good men to plead their innocence as a reason for escaping from the results of sins wrongfully ascribed to them; penitents do not bedaub themselves with mire for the love of it, or make themselves out to be worse than they are out of compliment to heaven. No, the humblest saint is not a fool, and he is as well aware of the matters wherein he is clear as of those wherein he must cry "*peccavi.*" To plead guilty to offences we have never committed is as great a lie as the denial of our real faults. "*O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee.*" Lest any man should suppose that David trusted in his own holiness he immediately declared his trust in the Lord, and begged to be saved as one who was not holy in the sense of being perfect, but was even yet in need of the very elements of salvation. How sweet is that title, "my God," when joined to the other, "servant;" and how sweet is the hope that on this ground we shall be saved; seeing that our God is not like the Amalekitish master who left his poor sick servant to perish. Note how David's poor *I am* (or rather the *I* repeated without the *am*) appeals to the great I AM with that sacred boldness engendered by the necessity which breaks through stone walls, aided by the faith which removes mountains.

3. "*Be merciful unto me, O Lord.*" The best of men need mercy, and appeal to mercy, yea to nothing else but mercy; they need it for themselves, and crave it eagerly of their God as a personal requisite. "*For I cry unto thee daily.*" Is there not a promise that importunity shall prevail? May we not, then, plead our importunity as an argument with God. He who prays every day, and all the day, for so the word may mean, may rest assured that the Lord will hear him in the day of his need. If we cried sometimes to man, or other false confidences, we might expect to be referred to them in the hour of our calamity, but if in all former time we have looked to the Lord alone, we may be sure that he will not desert us now. See how David pleaded, first that he was poor and needy, next that he was the Lord's set-apart one, then that he was God's servant and had learned to trust in the Lord, and lastly that he had been taught to pray daily; surely these are such holy pleadings as any tried believer may employ when wrestling with a prayer-hearing God, and with such weapons the most trembling suppliant may hope to win the day.

4. "*Rejoice the soul of thy servant.*" Make my heart glad, O my Master, for I count it my honour to call myself again and again thy servant, and I reckon thy favour to be all the wages I could desire. I look for all my happiness in thee only, and therefore "*unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.*" As the heliotrope looks to the sun for its smile, so turn I my heart to thee. Thou art as the brazen serpent to my sick nature, and I lift up my soul's eye to thee that I may live. I know that the nearer I am to thee the greater is my joy, therefore be pleased to draw me nearer while I am labouring to draw near. It is not easy to lift a soul at all; it needs a strong shoulder at the wheel when a heart sticks in the miry clay of despondency: it is less easy to lift a soul up to the Lord, for the height is great as well as the weight oppressive; but the Lord will take the will for the deed, and come in with a hand of almighty grace to raise his poor servant out of the earth and up to heaven.

5. "*For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive.*" Good at giving and forgiving; supplying us with his good, and removing our evil. Here was the great reason why the Psalmist looked to the Lord alone for his joy, because every joy-creating attribute is to be found in perfection in Jehovah alone. Some men who would be considered good are so self-exaltingly indignant at the injuries done them by others, that they cannot forgive; but we may rest assured that the better a being is, the more willing he is to forgive, and the best and highest of all is ever ready to blot out the transgressions of his creatures. "*And plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.*" God does not dispense his mercy from a slender store which perchance may be so impoverished as to give out altogether, but out of a cornucopia he pours forth the infinite riches of his mercy: his goodness flows forth in abounding streams

towards those who pray and in adoring worship make mention of his name. David seems to have stood in the cleft of the rock with Moses, and to have heard the name of the Lord proclaimed even as the great lawgiver did, for in two places in this Psalm he almost quotes *verbatim* the passage in Exodus xxxiv. 6—"The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."

6. "*Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer.*" Even the glory which his spirit had beheld did not withdraw him from his prayer, but rather urged him to be more fervent in it; hence he implores the Lord to hear his requests. "*Attend to the voice of my supplications.*" Here are repetitions, but not vain repetitions. When a child cries it repeats the same note, but it is equally in earnest every time, and so was it with the suppliant here. Note the expression, "the voice of my supplications," as if they were not all voice but were partly made up of inarticulate noise, yet amid much that was superfluous there really was a distinct voice, an inner meaning, a living sense which was the heart's intention. This he would have the Lord sift out from the chaff, and hear amid the mingled din. May our prayers never be voiceless; may the soul's intent always give them a live core of meaning.

7. "*In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.*" A pious resolve backed by a judicious reason. It is useless to cry to those who cannot or will not hear; once convince men that prayer has no effect upon God, and they will have no more of it. In these busy days, and especially in troublous times, men cannot afford to waste time in entreaties which must be unavailing. Our experience confirms us in the belief that Jehovah the living God really does aid those who call upon him, and therefore we pray and mean to pray, not because we are so fascinated by prayer that for its own sake we would continue in it if it proved to be mere folly and superstition, as vain philosophers assert; but because we really, indeed, and of a truth, find it to be a practical and effectual means of obtaining help from God in the hour of need. There can be no reason for praying if there be no expectation of the Lord's answering. Who would make a conscience of pleading with the winds, or find a solace in supplicating the waves? The mercy seat is a mockery if there be no hearing nor answering. David, as the following verses show, believed the Lord to be a living and potent God, and indeed to be "God alone," and it was on that account that he resolved in every hour of trouble to call upon him.

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

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

10 For thou *art* great, and doest wondrous things: thou *art* God alone.

11 Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.

12 I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.

13 For great *is* thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.

8. "*Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord.*" There are gods by delegated office, such as kings and magistrates, but they are as nothing in the presence of Jehovah; there are also gods by the nomination of superstition, but these are vanity itself, and cannot be compared with the living and true God. Even if the heathen idols were gods, none of them in power or even in character, could be likened unto the self-existent, all-creating God of Israel. If every imaginary deity could start into actual existence, and become really divine, yet would we choose Jehovah to be our God, and reject all others. "*Neither are there any works like unto thy works.*" What have the false gods ever made or unmade? What miracles have they wrought? When did they divide a sea, or march through a wilderness scattering bread from the skies? O Jehovah, in thy person and in thy works, thou art as far above all gods as the heavens are above the nethermost abyss.

9. "*All nations whom thou hast made,*" and these include all mankind, since they all come of the first Adam—thy creature, and their lives are all distinct creations of thine omnipotence. All these "*shall come*" with penitent hearts, in thine own way, to thine own self, "*and worship before thee, O Lord.*" Because thou art thus

above all gods, the people who have been so long deceived shall at last discover thy greatness, and shall render thee the worship which is thy due : thou hast created them all, and unto thee shall they all yield homage. This was David's reason for resorting to the Lord in trouble, for he felt that one day all men would acknowledge the Lord to be the only God. It makes us content to be in the minority to-day, when we are sure that the majority will be with us to-morrow, ay, and that the truth will one day be carried unanimously and heartily. David was not a believer in the theory that the world will grow worse and worse, and that the dispensation will wind up with general darkness, and idolatry. Earth's sun is to go down amid tenfold night if some of our prophetic brethren are to be believed. Not so do we expect, but we look for a day when the dwellers in all lands shall learn righteousness, shall trust in the Saviour, shall worship thee alone, O God, "*and shall glorify thy name.*" The modern notion has greatly damped the zeal of the church for missions, and the sooner it is shown to be unscriptural the better for the cause of God. It neither consorts with prophecy, honours God, nor inspires the church with ardour. Far hence be it driven.

10. "*For thou art great.*" He had before said, "*thou art good ;*" it is a grand thing when greatness and goodness are united ; it is only in the Divine Being that either of them exists absolutely, and essentially. Happy is it for us that they both exist in the Lord to an equal degree. To be great and not good might lead to tyranny in the King, and for him to be good and not great might involve countless calamities upon his subjects from foreign foes, so that either alternative would be terrible ; let the two be blended, and we have a monarch in whom the nation may rest and rejoice. "*And doest wondrous things.*" Being good, he is said to be ready to forgive ; being great, he works wonders : we may blend the two, for there is no wonder so wonderful as the pardon of our transgressions. All that God does or makes has wonder in it ; he breathes, and the wind is mystery ; he speaks, and the thunder astounds us ; even the commonest daisy is a marvel, and a pebble enshrines wisdom. Only to fools is anything which God has made uninteresting : the world is a world of wonders. Note that the verb *doest* is in the present, the Lord is doing wondrous things, they are transpiring before our eyes. Where are they ? Look upon the bursting buds of spring or the maturing fruits of autumn, gaze on the sky or skim the sea, mark the results of providence and the victories of grace, everywhere at all times the great *Thaumaturge* stretches forth his rod of power. "*Thou art God alone.*" Alone wast thou God before thy creatures were ; alone in godhead still art thou now that thou hast given life to throngs of beings ; alone for ever shalt thou be, for none can ever rival thee. True religion makes no compromises, it does not admit Baal or Dagon to be a god ; it is exclusive and monopolizing, claiming for Jehovah nothing less than all. The vaunted liberality of certain professors of modern thought is not to be cultivated by believers in the truth. "*Philosophic breadth*" aims at building a Pantheon, and piles a Pandemonium ; it is not for us to be helpers in such an evil work. Benevolently intolerant, we would, for the good of mankind, as well as for the glory of God, undeceive mankind as to the value of their compromises,—they are mere treason to truth. Our God is not to be worshipped as one among many good and true beings, but as God alone ; and his gospel is not to be preached as one of several saving systems, but as the one sole way of salvation. Lies can face each other beneath one common dome ; but in the temple of truth the worship is one and indivisible.

11. "*Teach me thy way, O Lord.*" Instruct me thus at all times, let me live in thy school ; but teach me now especially since I am in trouble and perplexity. Be pleased to shew me the way which thy wisdom and mercy have prepared for my escape ; behold I lay aside all wilfulness, and only desire to be informed as to thy holy and gracious mind. Not *my* way give me, but *thy* way teach me, I would follow thee and not be wilful. "*I will walk in thy truth.*" When taught I will practise what I know, truth shall not be a mere doctrine or sentiment to me, but a matter of daily life. The true servant of God regulates his walk by his master's will, and hence he never walks deceitfully, for God's way is ever truth. Providence has a way for us, and it is our wisdom to keep in it. We must not be as the bullock which needs to be driven and urged forward because it likes not the road, but be as men who voluntarily go where their trusted friend and helper appoints their path.

"*Unite my heart to fear thy name.*" Having taught me one way, give me one heart to walk therein, for too often I feel a heart and a heart, two natures contending,

two principles struggling for sovereignty. Our minds are apt to be divided between a variety of objects, like trickling streamlets which waste their force in a hundred runnels; our great desire should be to have all our life-floods poured into one channel and to have that channel directed towards the Lord alone. A man of divided heart is weak, the man of one object is *the* man. God who created the bands of our nature can draw them together, tighten, strengthen, and fasten them, and so braced and inwardly knit by his uniting grace, we shall be powerful for good, but not otherwise. To fear God is both the beginning, the growth, and the maturity of wisdom, therefore should we be undividedly given up to it, heart, and soul.

12. "*I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart.*" When my heart is one, I will give thee all of it. Praise should never be rendered with less than all our heart, and soul, and strength, or it will be both unreal and unacceptable. This is the second time in the Psalm that David calls the Lord "my God," the first time he was in an agony of prayer (verse 2), and now he is in an ecstasy of praise. If anything can make a man pray and praise, it is the knowledge that the Lord is his God. "*And I will glorify thy name for evermore;*" into eternity gratitude will prolong its praise. God has never done blessing us, let us never have done blessing him. As he ever gives us grace, let us ever render to him the glory of it.

13. "*For great is thy mercy toward me.*" Personal experience is ever the master singer. Whatever thou art to others, to me thy mercy is most notable. The Psalmist claims to sing among the loudest, because his debt to divine mercy is among the greatest. "*And thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.*" From the direst death and the deepest dishonour David had been kept by God, for his enemies would have done more than send him to hell had they been able. His sense of sin also made him feel as if the most overwhelming destruction would have been his portion had not grace prevented, therefore does he speak of deliverance from the nethermost abode of lost spirits. There are some alive now who can use this language unfeignedly, and he who pens these lines most humbly confesses that he is one. Left to myself to indulge my passions, to rush onward with my natural vehemence, and defy the Lord with recklessness of levity, what a candidate for the lowest abyss should I have made myself by this time. For me, there was but one alternative, great mercy, or the lowest hell. With my whole heart do I sing, "*Great is thy mercy towards me, and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.*"

The Psalmist here again touches a bold and joyful note, but soon he exchanges it for the mournful string.

14 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.

15 But thou, O Lord, *art* a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.

16 O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid.

17 Shew me a token for good; that they which hate me may see *it*, and be ashamed: because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me.

14. "*O God, the proud are risen against me.*" They could not let God's poor servant alone, his walk with God was as smoke to their eyes, and therefore they determined to destroy him. None hate good men so fiercely as do the high-minded and domineering. "*And the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul.*" Unitedly oppressors sought the good man's life; they hunted in packs, with keen scent, and eager foot. In persecuting times many a saint has used these words in reference to Papal bishops and inquisitors. "*And have not set thee before them.*" They would not have molested the servant if they had cared one whit for the master. Those who fear not God are not afraid to commit violent and cruel acts. An atheist is a misanthrope. Irreligion is akin to inhumanity.

15. "*But thou, O Lord.*" What a contrast! We get away from the hectorings and blusterings of proud but puny men to the glory and goodness of the Lord. We turn from the boisterous foam of chafing waves to the sea of glass mingled with fire, calm and serene. "*Art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.*" A truly glorious doxology, in which there is not one redundant word. As we have before observed, it is mainly transcribed from Exodus xxxiv. 6. Here is compassion for the weak and sorrowing, grace for

the undeserving, longsuffering for the provoking, mercy for the guilty, and truth for the tried. God's love assumes many forms, and is lovely in them all. Into whatsoever state we may be cast, there is a peculiar hue in the light of love which will harmonize with our condition; love is one and yet sevenfold, its white ray contains the chromatic scale. Are we sorrowful? We find the Lord full of compassion. Are we contending with temptation? His grace comes to our aid. Do we err? He is patient with us. Have we sinned? He is plenteous in mercy. Are we resting on his promise? He will fulfil it with abundant truth.

16. "*O turn unto me.*" As though the face of God had been before averted in anger, the suppliant pleads for a return of conscious favour. One turn of God's face will turn all our darkness into day. "*And have mercy upon me,*" that is all he asks, for he is lowly in heart; that is all he wants, for mercy answereth all a sinner's needs. "*Give thy strength unto thy servant.*" Gird me with it that I may serve thee, guard me with it that I may not be overcome. When the Lord gives us his own strength we are sufficient for all emergencies, and have no cause to fear any adversaries. "*And save the son of thine handmaid.*" He meant that he was a home-born servant of God. As the sons of slaves were their master's property by their birth, so he gloried in being the son of a woman who herself belonged to the Lord. What others might think a degrading illustration he uses with delight, to show how intensely he loved the Lord's service; and also as a reason why the Lord should interpose to rescue him, seeing that he was no newly-purchased servant, but had been in the house from his very birth.

17. "*Shew me a token for good.*" Let me be assured of thy mercy by being delivered out of trouble. "*That they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed.*"

"Some token of thy favour show,  
Some sign which all my foes may see;  
And fill'd with blank confusion know,  
My comfort and my help in thee."

What bodes good to me shall make them quail and blush. Disappointed and defeated, the foes of the good man would feel ashamed of what they had designed. "*Because thou, LORD, hast holpen me, and comforted me.*" God doth nothing by halves, those whom he helps he also consoles, and so makes them not merely safe but joyful. This makes the foes of the righteous exceedingly displeas'd, but it brings to the Lord double honour. Lord, deal thou thus with us evermore, so will we glorify thee, world without end. Amen.

#### EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

*Title.*—The prophet David has penned two Psalms which he has eminently appropriated to himself as his own: the one is styled *David's prayer*, though many other Psalms are prayers—it is Psalm lxxxvi.; the other *David's praise*. Ps. cxlv. The first his *lephilla*, the latter his *tehilla*; in each of these he makes a solemn rehearsal of the very words of Moses, in Exodus xxxiv. 6, 7. In Psalm lxxxvi. he brings them in as they were a support unto his faith in his distresses from sins and miseries, to which use he puts them, ver. 3, 4, 6, and 7. And again, ver. 16, 17, he makes a plea of these words by way of prayer. In Psalm cxlv., he brings them in as they are an *elogium* or celebration of the glorious nature and excellencies of God, to excite the sons of men to love and praise him.—*Thomas Goodwin.*

*Title.*—This Psalm was published under the title of "*A Prayer of David*"; not as if David sung all his prayers, but into some of his songs he inserted prayers; for a Psalm will admit the expression of any pious and devout affections. But it is observable how very plain the language of this Psalm is, and how little there is in it of poetical flights or figures, in comparison with some other Psalms; for the flourishes of wit are not the proper ornaments of prayer.—*Matthew Henry.*

*Title.*—There was much, very much, of God's peculiar character, his glorious name, brought to view in the close of the last Psalm. This may account for its

being followed by another, "A Prayer of David," almost equally full of the character of Jehovah. The key-note of this Psalm is Jehovah's name.—*Andrew A. Bonar.*

*Whole Psalm.*—Christ prays throughout the whole of this Psalm. All the words are spoken exclusively by Christ, who is both God and man.—*Psalt. Cassiodori*, 1491.

*Whole Psalm.*—In this Psalm Christ the Son of God and Son of Man, one God with the Father, one man with men, to whom we pray as God; prays in the form of a servant. For he prays for us, and he prays in us, and he is prayed to by us. He prays for us as our Priest. He prays in us as our Head. He is prayed to by us as our God.—*Psalt. Pet. Lombard.* 1474.

*Verse 1.*—"Bow down thine ear, O LORD." As the careful physician doth to his feeble patient: so Basil glosseth here.—*John Trapp.*

*Verses 1—4.*—"Poor," "holy," "trusteth," "I cry." The petitioner is first described as poor, then holy, next trusting, after that crying, finally, *lifted up to God*. And each epithet has its fitting verb; bow down to the poor, preserve the holy, save the trusting, be merciful to him who cries, rejoice the lifted-up. It is the whole gamut of love from the Incarnation to the Ascension; it tells us that Christ's humiliation will be our glory and joy.—*Neale and Littledale's Commentary.*

*Verse 2.*—"Holy." The word has been variously translated:—*Godly*, De Muis, Ainsworth and others; *charitable*, or *beneficent*, Piscator; *merciful* or *tenderhearted*, Mariana; *diligently* or *earnestly compassionate*, Vatablus; *meek*, Calvin; *a beloved one*, Version of American Bible Union; *one whom thou lovest*, Perowne; *a devoted or dedicated man*, Weiss.

*Verse 2.*—"For I am Holy." Some have objected to David's pleading his own good character; but if he did not go beyond the truth, and the occasion called for it, there was nothing wrong in his so doing. Job, David, Peter, John and Paul all did it, Job xxvii. 5; Ps. cxvi. 16; John xxi. 15—17; Rev. i. 10; 1 Cor. ix. 1. Nor is it presumptuous to ask God to show mercy to us for we show it to others; or to forgive us for we forgive others, Matt. v. 7; vi. 14, 15.—*William S. Plumer.*

*Verse 2.*—"I am holy . . . thy servant which trusteth in thee." They that are holy, yet must not trust in themselves, or in their own righteousness, but only in God and his grace.—*Matthew Henry.*

*Verse 2.*—"Save thy servant that trusteth in thee." When God saves his servant, he saves what belongs to himself; and, when he saves him that trusts in him, he shows himself to be just and faithful, in carrying out what he promised.—*Bel'armine.*

*Verses 2—5.*—The aspirations after holiness which are found in this Psalm, coupled with its earnest invocation of mercy from the God with whom there is forgiveness, render it peculiarly applicable to those whose daily access is to a throne of needed grace. Christians know that while their *standing* is the blameless perfection of the Lord their righteousness, they are in many things offenders still. Nor do we ever fully prove the preciousness of Jesus as our portion, except we are drawn to him by that Spirit which reveals to us a nakedness and poverty within ourselves, which his blessed fulness can alone redress.

There is a consciousness of personal sanctification through faith (verse 2) associated with an acutely sensitive perception of intrinsic worthlessness, such as only finds relief in the remembrance of unaltered grace (verse 5), which, to the exercised spirit of one really growing in the knowledge of God, will address itself with an especial acceptance.—*Arthur Pridham.*

*Verse 3.*—"Be merciful unto me." Lest any should by the former words, ("I am holy,") suspect him to be a merit-monger, he begeth mercy with instancy and constancy of request.—*John Trapp.*

*Verse 3.*—"I cry unto thee daily." A great difference between saints and sinners in prayer is that sinners who pray at all, pray only when they are in trouble, whereas saints cry daily unto God. Compare Job xxvii. 10.—*William S. Plumer.*

*Verse 4.*—"Rejoice the soul of thy servant," etc. As I have not found rest in anything created, I have raised up my soul on the wings of thought and desire to thee my Creator. Love bears one's soul up; and it has been truly said, that the soul is more where it loves, than where it actually is. Thought and desire are the wings of love; for he that loves is borne on to, and abides in, what he loves, by thinking constantly on, and longing for, the object of his love. Whoever truly, and

from his heart, loves God, by thinking on him and longing for him, lifts up his soul to God; while, on the contrary, whoever loves the earth, by thinking on and coveting the things of the earth, lets his soul down to its level.—*Bellarmino.*

*Verse 4.*—"Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift my soul." If thou hadst corn in thy rooms below, thou wouldst take it up higher, lest it should grow rotten. Wouldst thou remove thy corn, and dost thou suffer thy heart to rot on the earth? Thou wouldst take thy corn up higher: lift up thy heart to heaven. And how can I, dost thou say? What ropes are needed? What machines? What ladders? Thy affections are the steps; thy will the way. By loving thou mountest, by neglect thou descendest. Standing on the earth thou art in heaven, if thou lovest God. For the heart is not so raised as the body is raised: the body to be lifted up changes its place: the heart to be lifted up changes its will.—*Augustine.*

*Verse 4.*—"Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul," intimates that he had brought himself to the Lord as a living sacrifice, even as the *heave-offering* in the tabernacle—to show that it belonged to God and to his altar, and, that man had no part in it—was lifted up by the hands of the priests.—*Benjamin Weiss.*

*Verse 4.*—"I lift up my soul." It denotes the devotion, fervency, heartiness, and sincerity of his prayer; the doing of it with a true heart, the lifting up of the heart with the hands unto God, Lam. iii. 41; or by way of offering unto the Lord, not the body only, but the soul or heart also; or as a deposition committed into his hands.—*John Gill.*

*Verse 4.*—"Lord." Here, and in all the verses in this psalm where *אֲדֹנָי*, *Adonai*, occurs, many MSS. read *יְהוָה*, *Yehovah*. The Jews, out of reverence to the incommunicable name Jehovah pronounce *אֲדֹנָי* where *יְהוָה* is in the text. It is, therefore, not improbable that *אֲדֹנָי* is the true reading in all these places.—*Note to Calvin in loc.*

*Verse 5.*—"For thou, Lord, art good," and whither should beggars go but to the door of the good house-keeper?—*Matthew Henry.*

*Verse 5.*—"Ready to forgive." The mercy of God is a ready mercy, and his pardons are ready for his people; his pardons and mercies are not to seek, he hath them at hand, he is "good and ready to forgive." Whereas most men, though they will forgive, yet they are not ready to forgive, they are hardly brought to it, though they do it at last. But God is "ready to forgive"; he hath, as it were, pardons ready drawn (as a man who would be ready to do a business, he will have such writings as concern the passing of it ready); there is nothing to do but to put in the date and the name; yea indeed, the date and the name are put in from all eternity. Thus the Scripture speaks to show how forward God is to do good; he needs not set his heart to it; his heart is ever in the exactest fitness.—*Joseph Caryl.*

*Verse 5.*—"Plenteous in mercy." It is a thing marvellously satisfactory and pleasing to the heart of a man to be still taking from a great heap; and upon this ground are those proverbial sayings, There is no fishing like to a fishing in the sea, no service like the service of a king: because in one there is the greatest plenty and abundance of that kind of pleasure that fishers look after; and for them that serve, and must live by their service, there is none like that of princes, because they have abundance of reward and opportunity whereby to recompense the services of those that do wait and attend upon them. . . .

And upon the same ground is it that the Scriptures, in several places, do not only assert and testify that God is merciful and gracious, but abundant in mercy and full of grace; and not simply that there is redemption in him, but *plenteousness* of redemption: Ps. ciii. 8, cxxx. 7; Isai. lv. 7; "Let the wicked forsake his way," etc.; "Let him return unto the Lord and he will have mercy; and unto our God, for he will abundantly pardon." The commodity which we stand in need of is mercy and the pardon of our sins, in case we have been unholly and ungodly creatures; this commodity is abundantly in God. There it is treasured up as waters are in the store-house of the sea; there is no end of the treasures of his grace, mercy, pardon, and compassion. There is no man, being in want, but had ten times rather go to a rich man's door to be relieved, than to the door of a poor man, if he knoweth the rich man to be as liberal and bountifully disposed as the poor man can be.—*John Goodwin.*

*Verse 6.*—"Supplications." *שְׁחִינִים*, *deprecations*. The Psalmist forms a peculiar Hebrew word, feminine plural, not found elsewhere, to convey more impressively the idea of suppliant weakness.—*A. R. Fausset.*



*Verses 8—10.*—There are two kinds of doubt which are wont in the hour of temptation to assail the soul; the doubt as to God's *willingness*, and the doubt as to God's *power* to succour. The first of these the Psalmist has already put from him; he now shows that he has overcome the second. God is able as well as willing to help, and every being on the face of the earth who receives help, receives it from the hand of Him who is the only God, and who shall one day be recognized (so speaks the strong prophetic hope within him, ver. 9) as the only God.—*J. J. S. Perowne.*

*Verses 9, 10.*—“*All nations shall worship before thee,*” because as *King of Nations*, thou art great, thy sovereignty absolute and incontestable, thy Majesty terrible and unsupportable, thy power universal and irresistible, thy riches vast and inexhaustible, thy dominion boundless and unquestionable; and for the proof of this, “*thou doest wondrous things,*” which all nations admire, and from whence they might easily infer that “*thou art God alone* ;” not only none like thee, but none beside thee.—*Matthew Henry.*

*Verse 11.*—“*Teach me thy way :*” “*I will walk in thy truth : unite my heart.*” Here is the “*Via, Veritas, Vita*” of the Gospel (John xiv. 6). “*Via tua, Veritas tua, Vita tua, Christus.*” Christ is our Way, Truth, and Life, because he is Man united to God, and is one substance with the Father.—*Christopher Wordsworth.*

*Verse 11.*—“*Teach me.*” There is no point on which the world is more dark than that of its own ignorance—we might truly say, “*it is ignorant of its ignorance*”—it knows enough when it learns by rote a few first principles of religion; it comforts itself that it is not atheistical because it believes that there is a God; but as to knowing his ways, laws, mind, or any such things, with them it has nothing at all to do. The people of the world do not care for enlightenment; they feel no pressing need for it; in all probability they have an instinctive feeling that if enlightened they would know a little more than they wish to know, that their newly-acquired knowledge would interfere with their old habits and ways, and this is one reason why all spiritual teaching which goes beneath the surface is distasteful to the majority of men. They cannot bear to be brought into contact with God, in anything but a general way; the particulars of his character may not agree over well with the particulars of their lives!

It is the fashion in the present day to talk of man's enlightenment, and to represent human nature as upheaving under its load, as straining towards a knowledge of truth; such is not in reality the case, and whenever there is an effort in the mind untaught of the Spirit, it is directed towards God as the great *moral* and not as the great *spiritual* Being. A man untaught of the Holy Ghost may long to know a *moral*, he can never desire to know a *spiritual* Being.—*John Hyatt, 1767—1826.*

*Verse 11.*—“*Teach.*” The common version of the verb here is too vague, as it fails to bring out the peculiar suitability of the term to express the kind of teaching here specifically meant. The original meaning of the Hebrew word is *to point out or mark the way.*—*J. A. Alexander.*

*Verse 11.*—“*I will walk in thy truth.*” Conform to Scripture. Let us lead Scripture lives. Oh that the Bible might be seen to be printed in our lives! Do what the Word commands. Obedience is an excellent way of commenting upon the Bible.

Let the Word be the sun-dial by which you set your life. What are we the better for having the Scriptures, if we do not direct all our speeches and actions according to it? What is a carpenter better for his rule about him, if he sticks it at his back, and never makes use of it for measuring and squaring? So, what are we the better for the rule of the Word, if we do not make use of it, and regulate our lives by it?—*Thomas Watson.*

*Verse 11.*—“*I will walk in thy truth.*” *Walking*, in the Scripture, takes in the whole of our conversation or conduct: and to walk in anything, intends a fulness of it. For a man to walk in pride, is something more than to be proud: it says, that pride is his way, his element; that he is wholly under the influence of it.—*William Jay.*

*Verse 11.*—“*Unite my heart to fear thy name.*” The end which he desired to secure was that he might truly fear God, or properly reverence and honour him; the means which he saw to be necessary for this was that his “*heart*” might be “*united*” in this one great object; that is, that his heart might be single in its views

and purposes ; that there might be no distracting purposes ; that one great aim might be always before him. The word rendered *unite*—*וּבְיָחַד*, *yâhhad*—occurs as a verb only in three places. In Gen. xlix. 6 it is rendered *united* : “ Unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou *united*.” In Isa. xiv. 20 it is translated *joined* : “ Thou shalt not be *joined* unto them.” The *adverb*—*בְּיָחַד*, *ya-hhad*—occurs often, and is rendered *together*, Gen. xiii. 6 ; xxii. 6, 8, 19 ; xxxvi. 7 ; *et sæpe*. The *idea* is that of union, or conjunction ; of being together ; of constituting *one* ; and this is accomplished in the heart when there is one great ruling object before the mind which nothing is allowed to interfere with. It may be added, that there is no more appropriate prayer which a man can offer than that his heart *may* have such unity of purpose, and that nothing may be allowed to interfere with that one supreme purpose.—*Albert Barnes*.

*Verse 11.*—“*Unite my heart,*” etc. Sincerity drives but one design, and that is to please and enjoy God ; and what can more establish and fix the soul in the hour of temptation than this ? The reason why the hypocrite is unstable in all his ways, is given us by the apostle : he is “ a double-minded man,” a man of two souls in one body ; as a profane wretch once boasted, that he had one soul for God, and another for any thing. But all the designs of a gracious heart are united in one ; and so the entire stream of his affections runs strong.

It is base by-ends and self-interests, that, like a great many ditches cut out of the bank of a river, draw away the stream out of its proper channel, and make its waters fail. But if the heart be *united* for God, then we may say of such a Christian, as was said of a young Roman, “ What he does is done with all his might.” A man of only one design, puts out all his strength to carry it ; nothing can stand before him.

Sincerity brings a man’s will into subjection to the will of God ; and this being done, the greatest danger and difficulty is over with such a man. This is that holy oil which makes the wheels of the soul run nimbly, even in the difficult paths of obedience.—*John Flavel*.

*Verse 11.*—“*Unite my heart.*”

Give me thine heart but as I gave it thee ;  
Or give it me at least as I  
Have given mine  
To purchase thine.  
I halv’d it not when I did die ;  
But gave myself wholly to set thee free.

The heart I gave thee was a living heart ;  
And when thy heart by sin was slain,  
I laid down mine  
To ransom thine,  
That thy dead heart might live again,  
And live entirely perfect, not in part.

But whilst thine heart’s divided, it is dead ;  
Dead unto me, unless it live  
To me alone,  
It is all one  
To keep all, and a part to give :  
For what’s a body worth without an head !

Yet, this is worse, that what thou keep’st from me  
Thou dost bestow upon my foes ;  
And those not mine  
Alone, but thine ;  
The proper causes of thy woes,  
From whom I gave my life to set thee free.

Have I betroth’d thee to myself, and shall  
The devil, and the world, intrude  
Upon my right,  
E’en in my sight ?  
Think not thou canst me so delude :  
I will have none, unless I may have all.

I made it all, I gave it all to thee,  
 I gave all that I had for it :  
 If I must lose,  
 I'd rather choose  
 Mine interest in all to quit :  
 Or keep it whole, or give it whole to me.

—Francis Quarles, in *"The School of the Heart."*

Verse 11.—*"Unite my heart to fear thy name."*

In knots, to be loosed never,  
 Knitt my heart to thee for ever,  
 That I to thy name may beare  
 Fearful love and loving feare.

—Francis Davison.

Verse 12.—*"I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart : and I will glorify thy name."* We glorify God by praising him. Doxology, or praise, is a God-exalting work. Ps. l. 23. *"Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me."* The Hebrew word, *Bara*, to create, and *Barak*, to praise, are little different, because the end of creation is to praise God. Though nothing can add to God's essential glory, yet praise exalts him in the eyes of others. When we praise God, we spread his fame and renown, we display the trophies of his excellency. In this manner the angels glorify him ; they are the choristers of heaven, and do trumpet forth his praise. Praising God is one of the highest and purest acts of religion. In prayer we act like men ; in praise we act like angels. Believers are called "temples of God," 1 Cor. iii. 16. When our tongues praise, then the organs of God's spiritual temple are sounding. How sad it is that God hath no more glory from us in this way ! Many are full of murmuring and discontent, but seldom bring glory to God, by giving him the praise due to his name. We read of the saints having harps in their hands, the emblems of praise. Many have tears in their eyes and complaints in their mouths, but few have harps in their hands, blessing and glorifying God. Let us honour God this way. Praise is the quit-rent we pay to God : while God renews our lease, we must renew our rent.—Thomas Watson.

Verse 12.—*"I will praise thee, O Lord,"* etc. Such a soul as David was is enlarged to talk high of God : *"I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart : and I will glorify thy name for evermore."* Alas ! poor creature, how canst thou praise him *"for evermore" ?* A soul fired with desire to praise God, burns after both more perfect things and more lasting than it is able to perform. *"To will is present with it,"* etc. See but the reachings and longings of such a soul, how it swells in desires to glorify God !—Thomas Goodwin.

Verse 12.—*"With all my heart."* When my heart is united to fear thy name, then shall I praise thee with my whole heart.—Adam Clarke.

Verse 13.—*"Hell"* is put metaphorically for great and extreme dangers, or miseries which seem irrecoverable and remediless ; these are figuratively called *hell*, because hell, properly taken, is a place from whence there is no recovery. There's no release from the chains of darkness : all changes are on earth ; heaven and hell know none. When David praises the Lord *for delivering his soul from the lowest hell*, he meaneth an estate on earth of the lowest and deepest danger imaginable : mercy helped him at the worst. To be as low as hell, is to be at the lowest.—Joseph Caryl.

Verse 13.—*"The lowest hell."* According to Jewish traditions, there are seven different regions, in the abode of departed souls.—Daniel Cresswell.

Verse 13.—*"Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell."* Some one having a troublesome cause was to be sent to prison : another comes and defends him ; what does he say when he thanks him ? Thou hast delivered my soul out of prison. A debtor was to be tortured : his debt is paid ; he is said to be delivered from being tortured. They were not in all these evils ; but because they were in such due course towards them, that unless aid had been brought, they would have been in them, they rightly say that they are delivered from thence, whither they were not suffered by their deliverers to be taken.—Augustine.

Verses 13, 16.—There is no stronger argument of God's infallible readiness to grant our requests, than the experience of his former concessions. So David reasons, *"The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the*

bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine," 1 Sam. xvii. 37. This is the argument *a priori*, the voice of a strong faith, that persuades the conscience God will be gracious to him, because he hath been gracious. The prophet thus often comforted his soul: "Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress;" therefore, "have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer," Ps. iv. 1. So, "Thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell;" therefore, "*O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me.*" Let the justiciaries deduce arguments from their own present merits, my soul from God's former mercies. Thou, O Lord, madest me good, restorest me when I was evil; therefore have mercy upon me, miserable sinner, and give me thy salvation. Thus Paul grounded his assurance: because the Lord had stood with him, and delivered him out of the lion's mouth; therefore the Lord shall deliver me still, from every evil work, and preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom, 2 Tim. iv. 17, 18.—*Thomas Adams.*

Verse 15.—"*Thou, O Lord, Adonai, art a God; El, the strong God, full of compassion;*" the same words as Moses useth. Instead of *Jehovah, Adonai* is used, "O Lord;" but then *El, strong God*, is the same word.

The meaning is, let all the strength and power thou the strong God hast in thee be for my advantage. Now, is it not a bold request to say, Lord, wilt thou give me all thy strength to help me? A very bold request indeed; but his mercy moves him to grant it. Thus then petition him: Thou art a God merciful and gracious, give thy strength to me! Thou, O God, givest all thy attributes up to thy children, to serve their advantage, as well as to serve thy own glory; give me thy strength!—*Thomas Goodwin.*

Verse 15.—"*Full of compassion.*" The original word *Rachum* is very emphatical; it signifies such tenderness as parents have toward their children when their bowels yearn within them.—"*Critical and Practical Exposition of the Pentateuch.*" 1748.

Verse 16.—"*Save the son of thine handmaid.*" Deliver me, who am as completely thy property, as the offspring of a female slave born in her master's house, and which belongs of right to him. Gen. xiv. 14; Jer. ii. 14.—*William Keatinge Clay.*

Verse 17.—"*Shew me a token for good.*" These words do not, as some think, necessarily imply David's asking for some specific or miraculous token: he regards deliverance itself as a token. We ask whether it be not true, that in the same measure as we recognise the mysteriously governing influence of God in every-day events, we regard those things as signs and miracles, which to others appear common-place?—*Augustus F. Tholuck.*

Verse 17.—Perhaps, the "*token for good*" means that spiritual joy which he asked for in the beginning of the Psalm, when he said, "*Rejoice the soul of thy servant;*" for such joy to a holy soul in tribulation is the clearest sign of the grace of God, and on the sight of it all manner of persecutors are confounded; and then the meaning would be, "*shew me a token for good;*" give me the grace of that spiritual joy that will appear exteriorly in my countenance, "*that they which hate me may see*" such calmness and tranquillity of soul, "*and be confounded,*" for thou, O Lord, hast helped me in the struggle, consoled me in my sorrow, and hast already converted my sadness into interior joy and gladness.—*Robert Bellarmine.*

Verse 17.—"*Shew me a token for good,*" may be rendered "make me a sign for good." Weiss paraphrases it, "make of me such a sign or monument of good that all my enemies may be arrested by it, and be daunted at injuring a man so assisted by the Lord."

Verse 17.—"*Hast holpen me,*" in struggle; "*and comforted me,*" in sorrow.—*Augustine.*

## HINTS TO PREACHERS.

*Verse 1.*—I. A singular request—that the Lord should bow his ear. II. A singular plea—"I am poor and needy." III. The singular grace of God will answer the request, because singular grace has made the petitioner feel his need.

*Verse 2.*—I. The blessing sought is present, spiritual, complete and final preservation. II. Our reasons for expecting it are—1. Our belonging to God—"I am holy." 2. God's belonging to us—"my God." 3. Our faith, which has the promises. 4. Our fruits, which prove our faith—"thy servant."

*Verse 3.*—Importunity. 1. When she pleads—"daily." 2. How she pleads—"I cry." 3. To whom she pleads—"unto thee." 4. For what she pleads—"be merciful."

*Verse 3.*—"I will cry daily" for pardoning, sanctifying, assisting, preserving, providing and guiding mercy.—*William Jay.*

*Verse 4.*—I. The believer's joy is from God—"Rejoice," etc. II. The believer's joy is in God—"unto thee," etc.—*G. R.*

*Verse 4.*—The great lift. I. The heavy weight—"my soul." II. The weak worker—"I lift." III. The great height—"unto thee." IV. The appointed machinery—means of grace; and, V. The expected aid—"Rejoice," etc.

*Verse 5.*—Encouraging thoughts of God. 1. He has goodness in his essence. 2. He has forgiveness in readiness. 3. He has mercy in action, flowing forth from him plentifully. 4. His very discrimination is gracious—"all them that call upon him."

*Verse 6.*—The praying man desires above all things an answer. Objections to such an expectation. Grounds for continuing to expect, and duties incumbent upon those who realise such expectations.

*Verse 6.*—"The voice of supplication." It is the voice of weakness, of penitence, of faith, of hope, of the new nature, of knowledge, etc.

*Verse 7.*—1. Help needed. 2. Help sought. 3. Help found.—*G. R.*

*Verse 7.*—I. A time to be expected—"day of my trouble." II. A resolve to be practised—"I will call upon thee." III. A result to be experienced—"thou wilt answer me."

*Verse 7.*—Prayer is the design of trouble, the evidence that it is sanctified, its solace, and the medium of deliverance from it.—*William Jay.*

*Verse 8.*—I. God is one; the only God: characters of false gods inferior far. II. His works are unique. Nature, providence, grace, all peculiar in many respects. A good theme for a thoughtful preacher.

*Verse 9.*—The certain conversion of the world as opposed to modern theories.

*Verse 10.*—I. God is "great," therefore great things may be expected of him. II. He is unsearchable, therefore "wondrous things" may be expected of him. III. He is irresistible, therefore impossibilities to others may be expected of him: "Thou art God alone."—*G. R.*

*Verse 11.*—In the disposition of mind which is expressed in these words, the believer stands opposed to four descriptions of character. I. The ignorant and thoughtless sinner, who neither regards his way nor his end. II. The Antinomian, who is zealous for doctrines, and averse from the practice of religion. III. The Pharisee, who disregards religious sentiment, and makes practice all in all. IV. The hypocrite, who appears to be divided between religion and the world.—*John Hyatt, 1811.*

*Verse 11.*—The Christian as a scholar, a man of action, and a man of devotion.

*Verse 11.*—Holiness taught, truth practised, God adored; and thus the life perfected.

*Verse 11 (middle clause).*—We should walk in the belief of the truth, its practice, enjoyment, and profession.—*William Jay.*

*Verse 11 (third clause).*—The necessity, benefit, and reasonableness of wholeheartedness in religion.

*Verse 12.*—The art of praising God by heart.

*Verse 13.*—I. Where I might have been—"the lowest hell." II. What thou hast done for me—"hast delivered." III. What thou art doing—"great is thy mercy."

*Verse 13 (first clause).*—God's mercy great in election, redemption, calling, pardon, upholding, etc. It is so, at this very moment, in supplying my needs, preserving

from danger, consoling in sorrow, etc. Great is thy mercy *towards me*—so great a sinner, with such needs, so provoking, so full of doubts, etc.

Verses 13, 14, 15.—The three verses describe salvation, consequent persecution, and all-sufficient consolation.

Verse 15.—The shades of the light of love. Compassion upon suffering, grace towards unworthiness, long-suffering to provocation, mercy towards sin, truth towards the promise.

Verse 16.—I. My pedigree—"son of thine handmaid." II. My occupation—"thy servant." III. My character—needing "mercy." IV. My request—"turn unto me."

Verse 16.—In what respects a servant of God may be girt with divine power.

Verse 17.—What inward feelings and outward providences are "tokens for good."

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