

## THE PATIENCE OF GOD

## Psalm 86

This morning we are thinking about the patience of God or the longsuffering of God or the forbearance of God. In reading over the passages of Scripture which deal with the patience or longsuffering of God it is quite amazing to notice how many of them link the patience of God with the mercy of God. In fact if you like to visualize the attributes of God you can think in terms of the patience or longsuffering of God standing between the mercy of God on one hand and the wrath of God on the other hand. And some of the passages that we had this morning speak of the mercy of God and you notice it in the 15th verse which I called your attention to earlier in Psalm 86, "Thou O Lord art a God full of compassion and gracious, longsuffering and plentiful is mercy and truth." Now it is also an attribute of God which is related to His power. We have been noticing and I trust that you will always remember that there is an interrelationship of the various attributes of God. And God never exercises one attribute doing violence to another attribute. God is always consistent with Himself. But it takes the power of God to exercise patience. Now this is certainly indicated in the Scripture as far as we're concerned and you can see this for example in Colossians 1:11 where Paul is praying about the patience of the believers in Colosse and he expresses it this way that you would be strengthened with all might according to his glorious power and you have the feeling that something great must be coming if he is talking about all the might of God and all of His glorious power. But he indicates that it takes this and all of this is designed unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness. And the reason so often that we are not patient and we are not longsuffering is because we lack the strength for it and that strength comes from God. So in the exercise of His longsuffering and His patience this calls into operation the power of God and we see this indicated in so many of these passages. Now this means that God does not wait because people or circumstances keep Him from doing what He wants to do. Now this is often true with us. It is often true in illustrations that we see in Scripture. Esau wanted to kill Jacob but he felt that he couldn't do it as long as his father was alive. God is not dependent upon circumstances or people.

God is never in a position where He is patient or longsuffering because He doesn't know what to do. We have learned that God not only possesses great knowledge but God possesses all knowledge. He is omniscient. Now does He wait as we so often do because He has too many other things which need to be done first. God never finds Himself in that dilemma. Now does He wait as we might suppose sometimes because He has forgotten us. Or because He has forgotten some promise that He has placed in the Word. God has a perfect memory, as everything else about Him is perfect. And He never forgets us and He never forgets His Word. He doesn't wait because He has changed His promise, or because He has changed in His mercy and His goodness relative to His promise. He hasn't changed His Word. The psalmist in Psalm 119:89 says that , "Forever O Lord thy word is settled in heaven." And He is a God with whom there is no variableness neither shadow of turning. One of the modern translations renders that not even the shadow of a change. So everything about God is immutable. So whether we are talking about His patience toward the world in its sin or His patience toward His own people in their frailty and their weakness the teaching of Scripture is that God waits, God is longsuffering, God is patient, God is forbearing because in the exercise of His sovereign power He chooses to wait. Now it should greatly relieve our minds and set our hearts at rest if we can realize just what is involved in this wonderful truth. Now this does not mean that we shouldn't pray and even pray fervently and unceasingly. That of course is what the psalmist is doing in the Psalm which we read this morning. Some of the greatest prayers in Scripture deal with God's apparent reluctance to meet the needs of His people. But before we deal with some of the practical problems connected with the patience of God it is important that we have a true understanding and I have tried to outline these things for you in connection with this as an attribute of God. It has to do with all men. With saved men, with unsaved men. As we look in the Scriptures we see that God has His own purpose in waiting. He never delays beyond His appointed times. We do not always know what He is doing. In fact that are many things about the ways of God that remain a mystery to us. But

He waits in the manifestation of His blessings and He waits in the demonstration of His wrath because He has chosen of His own will to do so. And so this morning in the time that we have I want to look at both of these aspects of the longsuffering and patience of God. Now by that I mean His patience toward us as His people and His patience toward the world in its sin. And thinking about the Lord's people I want you to look with me for a few moments at this 86th Psalm. And so if you have your Bibles opened I am not going to try to deal with the Psalm verse by verse or even deal with all of the verses but I want to pick out of this some of the great truths that apply to our own lives where the patience of God is concerned. I doubt if you have known the Lord very long but what you have been impressed with the fact that God is amazingly patient with all of us. And the primary emphasis in Psalm 86 is that David is concerned about his enemies and if you have the title in your Bible that I have in mine you notice that this is listed as a prayer of David and as you read through this Psalm ~~was~~ we did this morning perhaps you notice both the fact that David needed some things done for him by God and there is a confidence in his heart that God is going to do these things but to a certain extent they remain undone. Now the question is why is it that God waits, why is it that God delays in His dealings with us. Why does He delay intentionally if He is not subject to pressures, if He is never at a loss to know what to do. If circumstances cannot arise but what God is able to deal with them, if He chooses to wait and to be patient because this is His will, why does He do it when any of us know that in a moment of time God could instantaneously deliver us from every problem that we have. Now that's what we were faced with as the people of God. And I want to give you several answers from this Psalm and I want to do it quickly so that we will have some time to think just briefly about His relationship to the world. The message of the whole Psalm is that one of the primary reasons that God waits, that God is patient, that God is longsuffering in His dealings with us is because He wants us to pray. Now the whole Psalm is a prayer. And as you look at some of the expressions in the Psalm you see that David is not

only praying but he is praying with a fervency and He is praying, he indicates that he is praying unceasingly. Let me read some of these verses for you. Look at verse 1, "Bow down thine ear O Lord, hear me, for I am poor and needy." Verse 3, "Be merciful unto me O Lord for I cry unto thee daily." In other words this isn't a once for all prayer. This is a prayer that the Lord had heard for several days in a row. And because David hadn't gotten an answer yet he was coming back to the Lord again in prayer. Verse 4, "Rejoice the soul of thy servant for unto thee O Lord do I lift up my soul." Verse 5, "For thou Lord art good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee." Verse 6, "Give ear O Lord unto my prayer and attend to the voice of my supplications. In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee for thou will answer me." Now the expressions show that there was an urgency in the heart of David. And he had been coming to the Lord and he is dealing with the Lord as though the Lord were too busy to listen to him or the Lord hadn't heard his cry and so he says, "Lord bow down your ear and hear me." So it is obvious that if David had not been going through the difficulties that he was facing he never would have prayed like this. Somehow it takes trials and testings and difficulties of various kinds before you and I will learn to pray as we should. Now secondly you notice in this prayer that it was through these difficulties that the thoughts of David were directed toward the Lord. Now when you see that you are not sufficient to meet a need and you look around and see all the human help that is available and you realize that that is not sufficient then there is only one place that you and I can turn. And that is to the Lord Himself. And this psalm is unique from the standpoint of the way he seems to dwell on the attributes of God. You know in going through all of these attributes on Sunday morning one thing that this ought to do for us is it ought to enable us to pray more like God wants us to pray as a result of knowing these great truths. Look what he says in verse 5 and this was an encouragement to him to pray. "Thou art good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon him." Verse 8, "Among the gods there is none like

unto thee O Lord neither are there any works like unto thy works." Verse 10, "For thou art great and doest wondrous things. Thou art God alone." Verse 13, "For great is thy mercy toward me and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell." Verse 15, "But thou O Lord art a God full of compassion and gracious, longsuffering and plenteous in mercy and truth." And therefore when the need arose and the burdens became unbearable, he not only came to the Lord in prayer but he reminded himself as he came of these great attributes of God and they were an encouragement to him in his prayer. But you can't do that without also doing the other things that is indicated here when we are thinking about God and that is you will notice that his heart is drawn out to the Lord in worship. It's expressed for example in verse 12. "I will praise thee O Lord my God with all my heart and I will glorify thy name forever more." And this seems to be what he is reveling in in verse 9 when he thinks of the day when all nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee O Lord and shall glorify thy name. Now there are times when we go through trials and testings and perhaps this is true to some extent with every test that we face when we get impatient with God, when we can't understand God, perhaps we become rebellious against God. But you notice in this psalm as David began to pray and he prayed fervently and he prayed unceasingly and he was being reminded of these great attributes of God, it doesn't seem that there is any uncertainty in his heart but that God is going to answer nor is there any bitterness or resentment because of the troubles that have come upon him. Instead here is an attitude of loving adoration toward God. And this was something that God was teaching him as God withheld the blessing that he needed, God in patience held back the deliverance because He wanted David to learn some of these things. Now when we look at David himself it was through this longsuffering of God that David was to learn some things. And I was interested to note that David emphasizes in this psalm that he learned some things that were expressive of his needs. And he also learned some good things about himself. Now let's look at the negative things first. He expresses for example in verse 1 his reason for coming to the Lord.

"Bow down thine ear O Lord and hear me for I am poor and needy." Verse 16 indicates something of the same thing, "O turn unto me and have mercy upon me and give thy strength unto thy servant and save the son of thine handmaid." Now he was coming to God because there was nobody else that could possibly meet his need and he didn't possess the strength to do what needed to be done and so his own weakness had been exposed. Secondly he learned that the heart of man is proud. He mentions in verse 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 thee." And David as you read through this is humbling himself before the Lord. He is confessing his need. He is showing how urgently he is in need of what only God is able to do for him. So that he had been humbled. And he had seen that the human heart is not only proud but it is stubborn. And God was waiting for these truths to be understood by David. And then he has to confess in verse 11 that there are things about the ways of God that he doesn't know. Have you ever prayed the prayer that is in verse 11. When he says, "Teach me thy way O Lord I will walk in thy truth, unite my heart to fear thy name." David was going through all of the perplexity and the unrest of heart that any child of God goes through but these were some of the purposes that God had in mind. Not only was God turning David's heart to the Lord Himself but God by His longsuffering and by withholding the blessing which David was seeking is teaching David some important lessons about Himself. Well what about the positive side. You notice his statement in verse 2. "Preserve my soul for I am holy" meaning that he was godly, meaning that he in his life had been seeking to please the Lord. The Apostle John gives us that wonderful verse you may know it from memory, I John 3:22 "And whatsoever we ask we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do the things that are pleasing in his sight." So that as David examined his own heart he saw weakness and he saw pride and he may have seen a certain amount of stubbornness and he saw lots of ignorance but he could honestly say before God I have been seeking to live a holy life, I have been seeking to live a godly life and

of course all the glory and honor and praise for this would go to God Himself. But then you will see also in this psalm that three times David mentions that fact that he is God's servant and this further emphasizes the truth that he was seeking to do the will of God. You have it in verse 2, "Save thy servant that trusteth in thee." You have it in verse 4, "Rejoice the soul of thy servant for unto thee O Lord do I lift up my soul." And then you have it again verse 16, "O turn unto me and have mercy upon me, give thy strength unto thy servant and save the son of thine handmaid. " You know David was in good company when he used this expression. On Tuesday morning we are studying the book of Joshua and we haven't gotten out of the first chapter yet but one thing that we have seen in the first chapter is the way in which God speaks about Moses. Now God buried Moses, nobody knows where he is buried. I don't know if there is a grave marker where he is buried or not. But if there is I think I know what it says on it. When the Lord spoke of Moses to Joshua He said this, and the Lord seemed to love to dwell on this, "Moses my servant is dead." And if you look through the books that Moses has written and also several references in the book of Joshua you will find that there are many times in fact this seems to be the outstanding title that was given to Moses. A man who devoted his life to serving the Lord so that when God spoke to his successor He refers to him as Moses my servant. And therefore you see David is in good company. The Lord Jesus Christ when He was here on earth emphasized the fact that if we would be great in His sight we would make ourselves the servants of all. Because in serving people we are serving God. There isn't any greater title that can be given to any person and here as David examined his own heart in this time of testing and trial he too could say in the presence of God that in his life and in his work, whatever time or whatever may have been the circumstances for the writing of this psalm he sought above everything else to be the Lord's servant. So it is wonderful if we can even say this that we can look at our lives and see that we are not what we used to be and

while there are still evidences of our sin and things that are displeasing to God yet we can take our place among those who are holy, those who are godly in the sight of God and those whose lives are being devoted to the service of the Lord. Then I could point out also one other thing and I will before I go to the other part of this subject this morning and that is that there seems to be in David's heart in this time of testing the remembrance of what God had done for him in the past. Now I mentioned as I began my message this morning that God never forgets anything. He has a perfect memory. As we get older we have a little more trouble hanging on to things in our memory don't we. But God is never bothered that way. But often times God withholds in His sovereign patience and longsuffering the blessing that we want so that we will start to reflect upon what God has done for us in the past. I see this often in Scripture. In fact you remember just before Moses died he gave the children of Israel a song, he taught them this song, they were to sing this song and it was to be a song that the Spirit of God would use to bring them back to the Lord in the days when they got away from the Lord and the very nature of that song was that it reviewed the blessings of God in the past. If you want something to encourage you in the midst of discouragement and difficulties and as you face unanswered prayer and you wonder why God doesn't do something to meet your particular need then dwell on the past, and be reminded of what He has done. Look what David says, verse 13, "For great is thy mercy toward me and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest sheol." And this means that God had in His wonderful mercy actually delivered David from death. Not once but many times. And David knew that the Lord was sufficient to do that again. Look at the last verse of the Psalm, "Show me a token for good that they which hate me may see it and be ashamed because thou Lord has helped me and comforted me. " And so he is greatly encouraged and I want you to see this this morning. I am sure that there are dozens of passages of Scripture, many of the Psalms that we could go to for lessons that are similar to this but what we need to see from this is that when God withholds His blessing God is longsuffering in



any way that may involve our lives. He has a purpose for it because He could move immediately to meet our needs and when He in patience withholds the blessing that we so desperately need. Remember it's not a mistake and God is not confronted with circumstances He doesn't know what to do with. But God is withholding them for some of the purposes that we have seen in this Psalm and many others that could be added to it.

Now let me speak for just a moment about the patience of God in relation to the world. Will you turn to II Peter 3. II Peter 3 now Peter brings up the subject of the long-suffering of God. You have it in verse 9. The Lord is no slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness but is longsuffering to usward not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. And then he mentions again in verse 15 and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation. Now the whole subject comes up because there were men in those days as there are men in our day who are scoffing at the promise of the Lord's return. And as I have said before and I think most of you who know the Lord realize that this is true, if the truth of the coming of the Lord were not really a truth that we could depend on I am sure that this hope would have died out long ago. But one of the most amazing things in our generation approximately 2000 years after the Lord Jesus Christ was here on earth you will find could I say as many Christians as there are in the world though they may differ as to the details but they believe that the day is going to come when Jesus Christ will return. That I say is an evidence, an amazing evidence of what God has done in the hearts of His people so that after all of these years, we are still looking for Him to come. Now if they were saying that in Peter's day how much more reason do they have to say it in our day. Where is the promise of His coming. For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation. So that when government leaders get together they don't take into consideration that you and I as Christians are looking forward to the coming of Christ. You don't

hear them talking about the fact that some day Jesus Christ Himself is going to come and as King of kings and Lord of lords He is going to rule over all of the nations of the earth, and He is the one who is going to be recognized as the sovereign leader over all. They don't talk about that. That's not in their thoughts. That's not in their plans. And it seems very foolish to most of them I am sure that there are many who do believe in the Lord but those who do not know the Lord discount these things. <sup>It</sup> The Lord hasn't come for 2000 years what can possibly make us think that He is going to come. And so men use this as an excuse to go on in their sin. To go on in their ungodliness and if this is not true then their right in doing so because Paul tells us in I Corinthians 15 that If we have no hope in Christ we are of all men most to be pitied. Because if Jesus Christ is not going to come, if there is no future life, if we don't have heaven to look forward to then that renders meaningless everything that is taking place in our lives today. You can't disassociate our present existence and our present experiences from that future hope. So the world casts it aside. But Paul says that this is an evidence of God's longsuffering. This is an evidence of God's patience. And He is slack concerning His promise only if the time comes, the time divinely appointed for Jesus Christ to return and He doesn't come. Now sometimes you and I may not meet appointments because we forget them or because circumstances make it impossible but remember we are talking about God. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness but is longsuffering to usward not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. Now let's look at this verse very carefully because here and also in verse 15 he says account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation, now notice even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you. Now think of just a moment. Peter says this is not something that I am teaching you along but this is something that the Apostle Paul teaches us and these are things which are difficult for us to understand he goes on to say in verse 16 and Paul speaks of these things according to the wisdom that has been given to him. Now is the Apostle Peter

saying here that it is not God's will that any should perish, any person on the face of the earth. When we look at the situation as far as the preaching of the Gospel is concerned the history of the Gospel from our Lord's day down to the present time we know that there have been countless multitudes who have gone out of this life without receiving Jesus Christ. We have asked you to pray for our son-in-law's father, who is not a Christian. And Frank told me on the phone when I was talking to them about this he say you know I can face the fact that my dad may die physically but he says I can't face the fact that he may die eternally as well, unless he comes to know Jesus Christ as his Savior. This is the burden that is upon our hearts concerning our loved ones who do not know the Lord. But the thing that the Apostle Paul is bringing here is if we say that it is not His will that any person on the face of the earth should perish then you have God in the position where He wants to do something that He cannot do. And that's the way that many people explain the coming of the Lord and many of these things that have to do with the Word of God. Now look at what Peter says again in verse 16. As also in all his epistles speaking in them of these things in which are some things hard to be understood which they that are unlearned and unstable rest as they do also the other Scriptures unto their own destruction. Now what Paul is saying here is that these ungodly men who are despising the Word of God, who are despising the promise of His return, who are despising what the Word of God has to say about judgement, who are despising the offer of salvation, who are despising the preaching of the Gospel, who are either postponing or disregarding altogether the warnings as the Apostle Paul himself said when he was preaching to the people in Athens. He says that God now commands all men everywhere to repent because he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man which he has ordained. And in those words He is referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now that day that the Lord is talking about is just as definite as the day was when the Lord Jesus Christ came the first time. And the preaching of the Gospel is going to all the world and all men

are held responsible for their reaction to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and Peter says here as he talks about this that those who don't understand these truths and those who are inclined to discount these truths because for example they haven't seen the Lord come or they don't understand some of the other things that they find in the Word of God they are inclined to set them aside and being unlearned and unstable in the Scriptures they distort the Word of God to mean what they want it to mean and as they do this they do it unto their own destruction. So any man who goes to hell is responsible for his own sin and for the fact that he has not listened to the message that has been proclaimed concerning the Gospel of our Lord Jesus.

Now as I close let me go back to this 9th verse. Have you actually read this verse right. Notice. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness but is longsuffering to usward not willing that any should perish. Now who is he talking about. He is longsuffering to usward. He is longsuffering toward us. Who are the us that he is referring to, not willing and we could accurately without doing violence to this verse, not willing that any of us should perish but that all of us should come to repentance. Now what does he mean, who are the us. Obviously he is talking about the saved. And you find in I Peter and you will find also in II Peter that Paul dwells on this subject of the elect. The elect according to the foreknowledge of God I Peter 1:2. II Peter 1:10 he says wherefore the rather brethren give diligence to make your calling and election sure for if you do these things ye shall never fall. Now I know that this falls in the category of things that are hard to be understood. And I know that there is no person who can answer all of the questions. But when Paul talks about the longsuffering of God with respect to the coming of the Lord he indicates that the reason the Lord Jesus Christ has not yet come is because some of the elect are still to be gathered in. It doesn't mean that God is helpless. It means just exactly the opposite. It means that God knows exactly what He is doing and out there in the world are people who are going to respond to the Gospel and we must

go to the whole world. We must preach the Gospel to every creature. We must get behind our missionaries. We must do everything that we possibly can to make the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ known because it's in the plan and purpose of God that our ministry should be used to reach those who are chosen of God and that the reason the Lord Jesus Christ has not come is not because He can't, it's not because He's forgotten His promise. It's not because circumstances have changed so that the world is completely different from what He thought it would be but it's that He has not come because He is longsuffering to usward not willing that any of us should perish but that all should come to repentance. He's calling out a people for His name. All that the Father gives to me shall come to me. And him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out. So that on the basis of this passage you read through I and II Peter when he deals with these grand subjects and you notice his ministry in the book of Acts and the way he proclaimed the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ this is what gives fervency and this is what guarantees God's blessing upon our ministry. If men are left to themselves nobody would ever come to the Lord Jesus Christ but God is at work today and God is accomplishing His purposes and while there may be things about it that we don't understand how wonderful it is to know that the longsuffering of our God, the patience of our God, the reason that He hasn't come is simply because there are people yet who must be saved before the Lord Jesus Christ is going to return. And this is our hope and this is what ought to thrust us out with renewed zeal and vision and faith in proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in the marvelous assurance that as we go to a world that does not want the Gospel, that does not want Jesus Christ God is working in their hearts and God is going to claim a people for Himself to the praise and to the glory of His wonderful name. Don't set it aside. This truth can be one of the most precious truths in the Word of God to you. You can't deal with the longsuffering of God without facing the fact that it is evident in the world today because God still has a work to be done and when that work is completed you can be sure that Lord Jesus will return.