

April 23

Psalm 70, 71, 77, 83, 86

My name is Steve Yost and I'm the director of worship at Christ Community Church.

With my role, it may not surprise you that the book of Psalms is a favorite of mine. It's essentially a book of worship. Each psalm captures the writer's response to God from a variety of perspectives. The composers, including David, Asaph and others, are not limited to a narrow range of worship expressions. Among their compositions we find exuberant praise and overflowing gratitude. God is adored, exalted and glorified. But the psalmists also pour out their laments to God; their fears, heartaches and disappointments. In desperation they call out for God's help even as they confess the certainty of His salvation.

Today we read Psalms 70, 71, 77, 83, 86.

They are grouped together because they are all very similar in some respects – they are what we could call “help me” or “save me” Psalms – songs that are written during difficult times by the Psalmist when he was being attacked or persecuted and he calls out to the Lord for help. I'm going to share with you some of the segments that most spoke to me out of today's reading. In Psalm 71, it's of special interest to me because it was written when David was an old man. He is facing trouble (yet again!) His enemies are looking for ways to exploit his growing weakness so he cries out to God for help but, he says in verse 5 – on the basis of a whole lifetime of experience – **“For you have been my hope, O Sovereign Lord...”** and in verse 14: **“But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.”**

My Dad turns 80 soon and is experiencing side effects surrounding his battle with cancer. These verses in Psalm 71 remind me of what my Dad might say, “I have all the hope in the world. God has never failed me before so I can believe He will not fail me now!”

And then in Psalm 77.

**“I thought about the former days, the years of long ago. I remembered my songs in the night; my heart mused and my spirit inquired; Will the Lord reject forever? Will He never show His favor again? Has His unfailing love vanished forever? Has His promise failed for all time?”**

In this Psalm, the thought that God may have abandoned Israel gives way to this: **“I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works...with your mighty arm you redeemed your people.”**

Then follows a poetic description of the amazing trip through the Red Sea.

Poetic or not, the last part of Psalm 77 sounds like the vivid eyewitness account of that amazing day passed down by oral tradition to the time of the Psalmist.

Read it again and visualize what it must have been like for the children of Israel to cross through the passage between the walls of water!

And then Psalm 83 is clearly a “help” Psalm. Verse 1 establishes that completely.

**“O God, do not keep silent, be not quiet, O God, be not still.”** It goes on to ask God to punish the enemies of Israel. This Psalm sounds a lot like many others we have read. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that instead of recalling the mighty deliverances at the time of the exodus, it remembers the deliverances that came during the period of the judges and in particular in the times of Gideon and Deborah. This Psalm is also an imprecatory Psalm. Do you remember what that means? It is a Psalm that calls down the wrath of God against the enemies of Israel. O Lord, punish them. Judge them. The Psalmist asks the Lord to, **“Make them like tumbleweed – like chaff before the wind.”** In light of the New Testament teaching about forgiveness, you and I are never very comfortable with these types of Psalms, but they are part of the Biblical record and they remind us that God is a judge and justice will be done.

And finally, let me read for you some of Psalm 86. The most important verses for me are 11 and 12. **<sup>11</sup> Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. <sup>12</sup> I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever.**

That is what this whole exercise called “Project 4:4” is all about. It, for me, is all summarized by that brief prayer.

Recently God’s been talking to me about what it means to have an undivided heart. David was called “a man after God’s own heart”. And if you remember, God was pleased with Caleb because he followed the Lord “wholeheartedly”, and in Deuteronomy we’re instructed to “love the Lord with all our heart”. And so it should be for us, as Christ followers, to worship God with all our hearts and with all we are.

Michael W. Smith wrote a beautiful musical expression about worshipping “wholeheartedly”. As we close, if you know it, sing it with me.

*Lord, I give You my heart  
I give You my soul  
I live for You alone  
Every breath I take  
Every moment I'm awake  
Lord, have Your way in me*