

Whom Shall I Fear? – Psalm 27
Argyle – 1/14/18 – Psalms Mini Series

Introduction to Scripture

A few years ago I realized there was a deficiency in my spiritual practice. That deficiency was my under use of the Psalms. I've always treated the Psalms like any other book of the Bible. I would read them as they came up in the *Discovery* or *Encounter with God* readings or whatever Bible reading program I was using at the time.

Then a few years ago I began to run into folks who incorporated the Psalms into their regular devotional routine. For instance, I read *The Rule of St. Benedict* which is a collection of the rules that governed monastic life. The monks would read several psalms a day and cover all 150 psalms in one week. That was impressive, but then again, they were monks. I figured that monks had a lot more time than I do. Then I found out that Tim Keller reads 5 psalms a day, covering all 150 of them every month. Tim Keller is someone I greatly admire and would like to be more like. Then I met Bryan Fitzgerald and learned that his church in St. Louis had a similar approach. So, I decided to start reading one psalm each day in addition to the other Scripture I was reading for the day. It has been a tremendous addition to my devotional life and I want to commend it to you.

The Psalms were Israel's prayer book. It is a collection of prayers and songs that the Jewish people used in their worship. That means it would have been Jesus' prayer book, as well. In the psalms we are given tools to help us worship God. Today and the next two weeks we are going to do a mini-series in the Psalms. In addition to preaching on one of the psalms each week, we'll be incorporating other psalms into the rest of the service. My hope is to give you just a little taste of the richness of singing, praying and studying the psalms.

Today we will be looking at Psalm 27. When my friend, Jackie Tyner, was dying from cancer she asked me if I would do her funeral. I asked her if she had a particular Scripture passage in mind that she wanted me to preach on. Without hesitating she said, "Psalm 27." She said, "When I was in high school I first read Psalm 27. At the time I thought, 'I am going to need this information some day,' so I memorized it. It is what has sustained me through a lot of trials including this one with cancer." I was a little embarrassed that I was not familiar with Psalm 27. Maybe you aren't either. So, as we read Psalm 27 this morning, imagine what these words would have meant to Jackie. Imagine what they might mean to you if you were to embrace them. (Read) (Pray-The LORD is my light and my salvation--whom shall we fear? The LORD is the stronghold of our lives--of whom shall we be afraid?.....)

It is Okay to be Honest with God

One of the things we learn from the Psalms is that it is okay to be honest with God. I had a friend once say that he became a Christian partially because of the psalms of lament. Psalms of lament are born in suffering. They are complaints against circumstances, sometimes against God himself. For instance, Psalm 13 begins, “How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?” (Psalm 13:1-2) One of the better known psalms of lament is Psalm 22 which Jesus quoted on the cross. It begins, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? ² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.” My friend said, “I wanted to know the God who you could speak so honestly to. If you could say things like that to him, I wanted to know him.”

In this morning’s psalm David says, “⁷ Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. ...⁹ Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior.”

What is on your heart this morning? Are you scared? Hurt? Happy? Sad? Angry? Disappointed? Tell God. The psalmists did. It is okay to be honest with God.

It is Wise to Seek God

Second, we learn that it is wise to seek God. David wrote, “When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. ³ Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.” Knowing something of David’s life we wonder if he is referring to the time when Saul and his army were trying to kill him or when his son, Absalom, led a rebellion against David’s rule as king. Though there were people out to kill him David says he was “confident.” Twice in this psalm he says he was confident. How could David be confident in such a situation? How can we be confident in the face of scary things?

The secret lies in the other word that shows up three times in this psalm - the word “seek.” ⁴ One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. Later, he wrote, “Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. ⁸ My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, LORD, I will seek.” The secret of David’s confidence is that

he knows what God is like. More than that, he knows God. He has spent time seeking God in worship and prayer and reflection and study, so that as he is faced with these challenges, he sees them in light of the greatness of God. “The LORD is my light and my salvation--whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life--of whom shall I be afraid?” Those are not words of wishful thinking, but words of confidence rooted in a knowledge of the presence and love of God.

They are reminiscent of Paul’s words of confidence at the end of Romans 8.

“³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all— how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;

we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither

the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

In my ministry I deal a lot with people in crisis - people who are suffering, people who are facing scary things, people who are in pain of one kind or another. It is one of the real privileges of my work to be invited by people into some of the most intimate times of their lives. My goal in times like that is to point people to God. I share Scripture with them, pray with them, tell them about a time in my life when God helped me in a crisis. In times like that I've noticed a profound difference between those who have been seeking God in their lives and those who haven't. The difference is one of confidence. Not confidence that everything will turn out okay, but confidence that they will be okay. This side of heaven, circumstances won't often get better. But in the midst of those hard circumstances God offers us his presence and peace and love and strength. “Whom shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid.” “What shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

I have heard people in the midst of great suffering speak similar words of confidence. That confidence has come from having sought the Lord and gotten to know him and his greatness before the time of suffering has come. Suffering is coming my friends. It is a regular part of life in this broken world. Have you sought the Lord so that you will be able to be confident in your suffering?

In the early days of the Nazi rule in Germany, Dietrich Bonhoeffer could see that suffering was coming for Christians. As a leader of the German church he set out to help people get ready for that day. He started to hold retreats for pastors where they would seek the Lord in intense Bible study and prayer. An important component of that was Scripture memorization, because Bonhoeffer anticipated that Christians would likely wind up in concentration camps where they wouldn't have access to the Bible. Eventually, Bonhoeffer's intuition came true and he, along with many other Christians who resisted the Nazi's were arrested. He spent two years in Nazi prisons and concentration camps. A few days before the end of the war he was executed. Right up to the end of his life, Bonhoeffer was leading worship services and teaching Bible studies and praying with his fellow prisoners. Those who survived spoke of his awareness that he was going to die and, yet, of his confidence in God. "Whom shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid."

Conclusion

What are you afraid of? What causes you to wake up at night? What makes you anxious? Let's be honest, there is a lot of things in this broken, messed up world of ours to be afraid of and many of us are afraid. Psalm 27 is for the fearful. It doesn't sugarcoat the challenges that we are faced with or give us false hope that everything will turn out okay. Instead, it gives us permission to be honest with God, to pray our own psalms of lament telling him how we feel. And it shows that

we are able to connect with God and know him and experience his presence and be confident that nothing will separate us from his love.

I came across a poem this week that is often quoted at the beginning of a new year. It begins, “And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year: ‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.’ And he replied: “Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way.”(From “God Knows” by Minnie Louise Haskins) We want light, but God offers us his hand. It is better and safer to have his hand.

Psalm 27

The LORD is my light and my salvation--whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life--of whom shall I be afraid?

² When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh,
when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.

³ Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

⁴ One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

⁵ For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.

⁶ Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me;
at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to
the LORD.

⁷ Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.

⁸ My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.

⁹ Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.

Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior.

¹⁰ Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.

¹¹ Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my
oppressors.

¹² Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against
me, breathing out violence.

¹³ I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.