

Facing Threats

Psalm 27

If I were to ask you what you worry about, what would you say? What produces anxiety in your life? What are the threats that are looming out there for you? As I've shared in the past, I so often I feel threatened by money issues. Are we being responsible enough? Are we making the right decisions? Is our financial future secure? What is it for you? Is it some kind of uncertainty in the future? Is it a health issue? Is it some kind of relational issue? What is that thing that you feel threatened by? I'm guessing that for most of us something popped into your head immediately when I asked the question.

Now, as you think about this threat, does your experience of God make any difference in how you deal with it? Do you find peace and assurance from God? Is there an experience of God that actually makes a difference? Or, would you have to say that even through you know you should find peace and assurance from God, the truth of the matter is that you really don't.

Well, thankfully for us, Scripture offers examples of people who experienced threats, but who also experienced real help from God. There are examples of people for whom God was more than just an idea or a principle; He was a real personal presence that brought help in the face of a threat. David was one such person.

This morning I'd invite you to turn with me to Psalm 27. I'd like to look at this psalm and see what we can learn from David's experience of God. The inscription at the head of this Psalm says "A Psalm *of David*." Literally, it is "*of David*." This can mean "written by David," but it can also mean "concerning David," or "dedicated to David." My personal belief is that David wrote this psalm. But, even if this psalm was written by another for David, the truths of the psalmist's experience of God in the face of a threat are still the same.

The writer of this psalm, which I believe was David, experienced God. For him God was not just a good idea, or a principle. God was a person in whom he had personal confidence and in whom he found great help. And so let's take a look.

The first thing we see is David's . . .

I. Confidence in the Lord's Presence (vv. 1-3).

David writes:

*¹The LORD is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the defense of my life;
Whom shall I dread?*

The context suggests that David is facing some kind of military threat. Verse 3 talks about a host encamping against him. Facing this threat, David says three things about the LORD. He is my light; He is my salvation; and, He is the defense of my life. *Light* is a metaphor that implies a force that dispels darkness. In this situation, the darkness is most likely David's enemies who are coming against him. God is *salvation*. God is the one who has the ability to save and give him victory over his enemies. He also says that God is *the defense of my life*. The NIV says the "stronghold of my life." God is one who provides a safe place. He is a fortress around David.

Notice that David does not just say that God is light and salvation and a defense; he says that God is those things for Him. He is *my light*. He is *my salvation*. He is *the defense of my life*. He believed it intellectually, but he also knew it experientially. The reason he knew it experientially is that he had experienced God's deliverances in the past. In verse 2 he says:

*² When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,
My adversaries and my enemies,
they stumbled and fell.*

The NIV translates the verbs here in a future tense. The NIV translators understand that David has confidence in what the Lord will do in the future to his enemies. But there are grammatical reasons to understand these verses as being past tense. And so David is looking back. He remembers how God has delivered him in the past and because of that he is confident about the future and he can say *whom shall I should fear? Whom shall I dread?*

Verse 3,

*³ Though a host encamp against me,
My heart will not fear;
Though war arise against me,
In spite of this I shall be confident.*

Even if enemies come against David to make war, he says that he would be confident. *In spite of this, I shall be confident*. Not in his own abilities or the strength of his fighting men, but rather in the Lord. He had experienced the Lord in such a real way that it made a difference in his life. He could be confronted with the most fearful situation and yet he was not fearful. He had confidence in the Lord's presence.

Do you find such confidence in the Lord's presence? Is your experience of God so real that you can look at your worries and concerns and say, "I'm not afraid." "I'm not in dread." "In spite of this thing, I shall be confident." David felt safe, not because all around him looked peaceful, but because he was confident of the Lord's presence. To him God was not just an idea or a concept, he was a person whom he experienced.

We can have the same confidence in God's presence that David experienced, but if we are going to have that confidence, we need to have a passion for God's presence like David had. As we move to verse 4, see David's passion for God's presence.

II. Passion for God's Presence

David says in verse 4:

*⁴ One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to meditate in His temple.*

He says there is *one thing* that he is asking from the LORD and there is *one thing* that he is seeking and that is that he may *dwell in the house of the LORD* all of his days. David is not saying that he literally wants to live in the Temple like a temple servant. Rather, in poetic language he is saying that his chief longing in life is to live in the presence of God. In the Old Testament, the temple was where God manifested His presence. And so when David says that he wants to *dwell in the house of the LORD*, he is saying that he wants to be in God's presence.

So, David is asking and he is seeking to live in God's presence all his days. In the second part of this verse he says why. He wants to *behold the beauty of the LORD*. The New Living Translation translates this as "delighting in the LORD's perfections." In other words as David dwells in God's presence, he is reminded of the character of God. And there is one thing that can be so helpful to us when we face a threat, it is to be reminded of God's goodness and His power and His love. David longs to *meditate in* [the Lord's] *temple* about these things.

David's passion was not just to know about God; he wanted to know God. He wanted to experience God. His longing was to live in God's presence. It was his prayer and it was the thing he sought after. He wanted to dwell in God's presence and see God's beauty and out of this he experienced great confidence in God. In verse 5 we read:

*⁵ For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle;
In the secret place of His tent He will hide me;
He will lift me up on a rock.*

David knew that there would be *a day of trouble*. And so he sought God because he knew that God would protect him in that day. When he says that God will conceal him in His tabernacle, that God will hide him and lift him up on a rock, this is poetic language that literally means that God himself will protect him. God is a place of refuge. And because of this he is not afraid in his current situation.

In verse 6 then he expresses his confidence that the Lord is going to deliver him and out of that confidence he rejoices. He says:

*⁶ And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me;
And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.*

David anticipates God's protection and victory over his enemies. God was real to him. God made a difference in his life.

Now, we are not going to look at the rest of the psalm this morning, but if you read through it you will continue to see this passion for the Lord expressed. Ultimately, in verse 14 David encourages all to take up the same pursuit of seeking the Lord. He says:

*Wait for the LORD;
Be strong, and let your heart
take courage;
Yes, wait for the LORD.*

Seek God's presence and out of that experience, find strength and real courage of heart. David is saying that the very real help he found in God's presence can be ours as well.

So how do we get there? How do we experience God in a real way like David did; in a way that gives us courage and strength and hope in the face of threats? David made it his priority. It was the one thing he asked and the one thing he sought. If we want to experience God's presence, we too need to ask for it and seek for it. I want to spend the rest of our time thinking about what it might look like to ask and to seek God's presence.

Ask

In verse 4, David said that the one thing he was asking from God was to be able to dwell in His presence and to see His beauty. We need to understand that we can only know God and experience Him if He chooses to reveal Himself to us. So, we should ask. J.I. Packer says this:

Knowing God is a matter of *grace*. It is a relationship in which the initiative throughout is with God.

The initiative is with God. We ultimately cannot make it happen ourselves, but here's the thing, God graciously longs to reveal Himself to us. And so we should ask.

I'm sure there are many things that you are asking from God right now. In light of your fears and worries, you might be asking God for better health; or better relationships; or a better financial situation. You are hoping that God will change your situation so you might have peace. But here's the thing, as I look at David's situation, his confidence

and a sense of peace and security didn't come once the threat was removed, it came in the midst of the threat.

I don't think there is anything wrong with asking God to change your situation, but more than asking Him to change your situation, ask Him to help you experience Him in such a real way that even in the face of whatever threat there is you find your heart at rest, at peace, because you really are experiencing God.

Ask for an awareness of God's presence as your rise in the morning. And as you move through your day, continue to ask. If you are like me it is so easy to move through large parts of my day with barely a thought of God. Seek to bring God to mind regularly throughout the day and to invite Him into your work, into your recreation, into your friendships or family life.

We should ask for a greater experience of God's presence. That's what David did. But secondly, we should also seek. And I would add, we should seek God slowly.

Seek God Slowly

As I think about David's approach to seeking God, I don't think that he rose up in the morning and while slamming a cup of coffee and a bagel, read his scroll for five minutes before rushing off to work. No, he sought God slowly. He spent time meditating on God and reflecting on God's beautiful character. When he says that he wants to dwell in the house of the Lord all of his days so that he can behold the beauty of God and to meditate on God, he is talking about seeking God slowly. He is contemplating God.

I think one of the reasons we often don't experience God's presence helping us in a real way to have peace or confidence in the face of our threats is that we often fail to contemplate God. Ronald Rolheiser says this about contemplation:

In Western culture today, most of us have an atrophied contemplative faculty, a muddled self-awareness. God is present to us, but we are not present to God. We lack the ability to be contemplative, and because of this we lack a vital experience of God. The eclipse of God in ordinary awareness is a fault in contemplation.

And then he adds:

Our struggle with unbelief, the struggle to make God more real in ordinary life, is really a struggle with contemplation (*The Shattered Lantern*, 22, 24).

Don't we all want God to be more real in our ordinary life? Don't we all want a vital experience of God that really helps us? If so, we need to seek God slowly.

I've often mentioned that times of solitude are important to me. Solitude helps me seek God slowly. In times of solitude I've found that God becomes more real to me. Let me give you an example. As I mentioned, I tend to worry about money issues. I know what the Scriptures say about God owning the cattle on a thousand hills. I know He is not poor. And I know that the Bible says He loves me and will take care of me and that He will provide for me. But so often that knowledge doesn't really help me. I still worry. But when I can get away for some solitude where I can meditate on these truths about God, they begin to sink down into my heart in a way that actually drives out the worry. More than once, God has met me in these times in an experiential way. And though maybe my situation is no different, I find peace or a new confidence in God.

I think for most of us seeking some special times of extended solitude in which we can reflect on God would be a very helpful thing to do. But we can also seek God slowly in our normal pursuits of God. I'm guessing that for most of us reading the Bible is one of the main things we do to seek God. I think if we would take some time after our reading for reflecting and contemplating that would help us experience God. I don't think it has to be a long time, but if we would just take some time to be still, to be quiet, to invite God to speak to us through what we have just read it would make a big difference. It would help us behold the beauty of God and believe it in our heart.

Seek God slowly. I believe God wants us to experience His presence and so we ask and we seek. This is how we can face threats and say, "In spite of this, I shall be confident."

I'll close with this story that I've shared before. A number of years back, when our youngest, Sam, was just a little guy - maybe 3 or so - we experienced one of those early morning April thunderstorms. At one point a loud crack of thunder shook our house. A few moments later Sam came into our room and asked me if he could get in bed with us. He crawled up in bed and I rolled over on my side facing Sam and he kind of snuggled up beside me. I put my hand on his back and he laid there half asleep. Eventually, I rolled over and took my hand off of him. As soon as I moved Sam said, "Dad, put your hand on my back." Sam wanted to know that I was there. He wanted to know it in an experiential way. My presence helped him feel safe in the face of a threat.

Sam didn't just want to know about a principle or the concept of a dad, he wanted to experience his dad. It was the experience that comforted him.

As you think about facing threats, know that God is real. He is not just an idea or a concept. He is a loving heavenly Father, who has His hand on your back. He wants you to experience His presence so ask and seek.

Amen.