

A Sight for Sore Eyes

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 September 2020

Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 00] Well, there are a couple of words that I think must be possibly the least helpful pair of words in the English language. The words, don't worry.

Perhaps somebody has said that to you recently. I often think, rarely if ever, do the words don't worry actually help anyone not to worry. We could all tell stories of times where we have been worried.

Perhaps to the point of being overwhelmed by fear. We know in that time that the thought of not worrying just seems out of reach. We talk about being in the grip of fear or being consumed by fear. Ways of saying that sometimes our fears have huge power over our lives. We feel out of control. And so these questions that we find at the opening of Psalm 27 are no small thing.

David says, 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? It's incredible.

[1 : 08] David is saying here that he is free from fear. Yet, as we read on, we find out that in fact there are very many things for David to fear.

Lies, rejection, violence, threats on his life. These are not irrational fears. David here is up to his neck in the worst that life could throw at him.

So how is it then that he can say, Whom shall I fear? Well, in this Psalm, David gives us a glimpse of the one thing in his life that is bigger than the things that he fears.

One thing that puts every other thing in its proper place. He brings us to the one, he says, who has been his help. To see him in his beauty and his goodness.

He is a sight for our sore eyes. Perhaps you are afraid this evening. Or perhaps you are supporting somebody who is deeply stressed or worried at this time.

[2 : 13] Our world is a fearful place. But in this Psalm, we meet a king who leads us away from fear to a place of safety. And a vision of beauty, full of goodness.

Words that we wouldn't use to describe this time that we're living through. But words that David uses of God as he fixes his eyes on him.

Who then shall I fear? Well, first we have to ask, what sort of fears is David facing at this point? In verse 2, he speaks about his enemies and foes.

Evildoers. The people are out to get him. And in verse 12, he gives us a sense of what they're up to. The NIV describes him as false witnesses spouting malicious accusations.

He's experiencing a smear campaign. People spreading lies to drag David's name through the mud. This is not a calm, reasoned discussion with people who disagree with him.

[3 : 14] As the ESV puts it, they breathe out violence. These are real, fierce enemies. So what does that feel like for David? In verse 3, he says it feels like war.

In his mind, it's as if an army has turned up on his doorstep, pressing in on him, breathing down his neck, crying out for his blood. And he is the last man standing on the battlefield.

That's a terrifying thought, isn't it? A terrifying place to be. We all know what it's like when fear comes over us.

It can cloud up our vision. Even physically, our vision might kind of go fuzzy. We see the world differently. But spiritually, it changes the way we see things too.

Fear fogs up the eyes of our heart so that we can't see a way out. We feel alone, helpless. The Lord seems out of sight. But notice, in the face of these fears, that isn't what David himself is going through.

[4 : 19] What we would naturally think would be enough even to send a king into a cold sweat. Can't touch this king. Why? Not because he's stronger than his enemies or because he has a secret trick up his sleeve.

No, look what David says in verse 1. The Lord is my light and my salvation. The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Threatened by a horde of fierce enemies, David says, I have a safe place. It's the Lord. Darkness presses in on me, but the Lord is my light. I may die tomorrow, but the Lord is my salvation. Listen, enemies are on my doorstep, but the Lord is the stronghold of my life. He has the security that can't be taken away from him because his security is the Lord. And because of who the Lord is, he is not afraid.

So free and fearless is he that his enemies don't seem like anything to him anymore. Who shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid? Anyone would think that David isn't facing any problems in his life. [5 : 33] Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear. Though war break out against me, even then I will be confident. The world is falling apart around him, but he is not shaken.

Because the Lord is the stronghold of his life. In other Psalms, David calls God his refuge, his shelter, his rock, his hiding place.

Images that speak of the invincible strength of God and the unending faithfulness of God and the undying love of God for his people.

He is a God who will not let us go. So is this God your God tonight? Do you have a stronghold for your life? Is it enough to protect you from the things that you fear most in life?

Is it enough to chase away the darkness? Is it enough to cast out fear? Is it enough even to keep your life through death? Do you know this God?

[6 : 40] Because he is here held out for you this evening in this word. So how is it that David gets to that place of not being scared, even by things that are very scary?

Well, it's not because his problems suddenly vanish. No, it's because his field of vision is instead filled up with something more real, heavier, weightier, than all the things that he might be afraid of. Verse 4, he says, One thing have I asked of the Lord, that only will I seek after. I wonder, what is the one thing that you would ask for in David's situation?

Caught in the heat of lies and the threats of his enemies, possibly you would ask for it all to stop, that these guys would just get off your back. There would be nothing wrong with praying that.

But what David actually asks for is bigger than that. He doesn't ask for God to change his situation. Instead, he asks, verse 4, In short, David asks the Lord to give him a clearer, closer view of himself, that he would go into the presence of God and never have to leave, that he would spend his life captivated by the beauty of the Lord.

[8 : 13] Now perhaps we think, yeah, that sounds great, but it's not very practical. It's not really down to earth, is it? We can't go through life ignoring our problems. But what is practical really depends on what the point of life is.

If the goal of our lives was to be problem-free, to live in comfort and ease, then gazing at God and being awed by him, while so much is going wrong, might sound like a waste of time.

We should be really trying to wrestle our problems to the ground. If the point of our lives isn't to be trouble-free, but instead to glorify God and to enjoy him at all times, then David's request is the most practical thing that he could ask for.

In fact, if David had looked at all his problems and been overwhelmed by them and tried to deal with them all and fix them in his own strength, he would be missing the point.

The vision of God in his glory, to gaze on his beauty, to be captivated by his goodness. This is what we are made for. This is the sight that squeezes out fear, out of the picture.

[9 : 29] Often we get so busy trying to fix our problems and solve our fears that we miss the very thing that would satisfy our hearts and put our fears in their proper place.

It is one thing to know that we have a stronghold for our lives and still live in the grip of fear. It is another thing entirely to go into that stronghold, to be overwhelmed by the goodness of God, to be captivated by a love that casts out fear, to seek that one thing above all other things.

In this life, we will always have things to fear. That is why if we only ask for one thing, it must be this vision of God because there is no safe place for us in this world apart from in his presence.

So here's a question to ask, perhaps at home or online this week. More than I want my problems to go away, do I want to be captivated by the beauty of the Lord?

Over the last few years, I've met up regularly with a number of guys to read the Bible, pray together, to encourage one another in the faith. And there are times of real joy and blessing.

[10 : 50] But sometimes guys have opened up to me about things that they are deeply afraid of. And one of the most helpful questions that I found to ask is, what's the worst thing that you think

could happen in this situation?

What is the worst case scenario for you here? That might sound like a really unhelpful question. It might sound like it could just make things worse. But it's a helpful question, partly because it helps get to the root of what it is that's causing that person to fear.

Is it fear of losing something? Fear of failing at something? Fear of being rejected by someone? Partly too, it helps when we're afraid to say our fears out loud to someone who we trust.

So what if we ask that question to David? David has told us about enemies threatening his life, spreading lies, breathing out violence. So what for David would be the worst case scenario?

Is it war? No, verse three, we read, even then he says, I will be confident. Is it being abandoned? Well, no, verse 10, he says, though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me in.

[12:04] What is the worst case scenario? What is it that David really fears? Well, he names it in verse nine. Do you not hide your face from me?

Do you not turn your servant away in anger, or you who have been my help? Do you not reject or forsake me, God, my savior? As long as David has the Lord, he can cope with war.

He can cope with being abandoned. He can cope with death. His great fear in life is not having the Lord. You've been my helper, he says. Don't turn me away, my savior.

He would rather have the Lord and nothing else than have peace and comfort without the Lord. Because this God, our God, if we are in Christ tonight, he is enough.

And the best news of all is that this great fear is something that, in fact, we need never fear. As Moses writes in Deuteronomy chapter 31, as he looks at a very fearful idea of going across the Jordan into a land full of enemies, he says, the Lord himself goes before you and will be with you.

[13:23] He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid. Do not be discouraged. We are weak. We have ups and downs.

Our hearts wander. We are vulnerable. But he is the Lord who takes us in and will never turn us away. How do we know that?

Well, in verse 8, we see David is only responding to God's invitation. You have said, seek my face. My heart says to you, your face, Lord, do I seek.

Hide not your face from me. God himself calls us to come and live in his presence, to set our eyes on his beauty and never look away.

So if we set our hearts on doing that, if we come to God and ask for that, we won't go away disappointed. There is no shadow of changing God.

[14:22] He doesn't have unpredictable mood swings. What he has said, he will not unsay. And he has said, seek my face.

Simply come. It's not too much to ask for. So is this your one request? This request that won't be denied for the one thing that we truly can't live without.

What does it mean to ask to see the face of God? Where do we look to see the face of God?

Perhaps tonight you feel far from the face of God.

Perhaps we feel like Philip when he comes to Jesus and says, show us the Father and it is enough for us. But tonight, if we feel far from the face of God, you need to let these words of Jesus sink in.

Jesus says, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Where do we find this heart-saturating vision of God? We see God's face when we look at Jesus Christ.

[15:35] His character, his words, his works, his strength, his faithfulness, his cross. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 6, God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That is the beautiful vision. He is the sight our sore eyes so need in this world full of fear. To gaze upon the beauty of the Lord is to have our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ.

He is the one who fixes our blurry vision. His cross is our place of safety. His death has brought us blamelessly into the presence of the living God and put God's great enemies to open shame.

So when our hearts are weak, when we are overwhelmed with fear, when the world looms large in our field of vision, let the one desire of our hearts be to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Probably most of us, I hope anyway, have never had an actual horde of enemies breathing down our necks. I have never received death threats through my door, for example.

[17:04] Sometimes that does happen. A pastor in one of our partner churches in Turkey, his family get regular death threats because of their faith in Christ. His family have had to move house

several times to keep their address secret.

The police come to their church service for protection. But when we're not receiving death threats, sometimes psalms like this can seem a little bit out of touch maybe.

Where are these enemies? You perhaps, actually you don't have very many things that you fear in life. But David is writing this not only as a guy who went through bad times, he's writing as God's king.

He is hated, opposed and threatened because he is the king after God's own heart. And in that context, we can see the kind of hostility David is facing isn't simply at the human level.

It's not simply about a personality clash at the office or neighbours who come complaining unfairly. No, what, the war that is raging around David is first and foremost a spiritual conflict.

[18 : 15] We might not face fearsome persecution in this country right now, but if we are living with God's king, if we are united to Christ, then certainly we share his opposition.

The world that we live in says that we don't want this man to be our king. Out of view, we have a spiritual opponent, the devil, who Jesus says is the father of lies.

We belong to a king who lived and died, opposed, slandered, besieged. So then we, his people, don't live on neutral ground.

Our lives are lived in a spiritual war zone. Perhaps like a lot of Christians, you have found the last few months spiritually really hard. Not being able to come together on Sundays, not being able to sing together, praying over Zoom.

Those kinds of restrictions are necessary for now, but in a context of spiritual opposition, it means our hearts are very vulnerable. We don't have the kinds of protections that we would normally have in life.

[19 : 28] He's speaking personally, even things that can go on as normal. Personal devotions, Bible reading, prayer, can be more of a struggle. I came across an article during the week that suggested that that's not just me.

There are times in the Word that in the past have been life-giving and joyful. Perhaps they've become dry and difficult. Spiritual life isn't always easy.

Why? Well, partly because we face spiritual opposition. Our hearts are besieged. Our trust in God is threatened.

Our minds are vulnerable because we belong to Jesus Christ. And therefore, we are faced with an army of spiritual enemies.

We cannot think of ourselves as strong enough to stand firm when we are quietly bombarded every day by lies about Christ.

[20 : 28] If we live with a peacetime mentality, this conflict is going to shake us. We will begin to fear the lies and feel isolated and alone and perhaps far from God.

And so, brothers and sisters, tonight, we need a stronghold. this psalm should send us running to the Lord, turning to God and throwing ourselves on his protection.

He is the stronghold of our lives. On dark and difficult days when everything is going wrong and on quiet, sunny days when everything seems fine, we need the safety of Jesus Christ.

When the world and sin and evil fill our horizon, we need to fill our vision once again with the beauty of the Lord, to come before his throne of grace to find help in time of need, to experience what David describes in verse 5.

He will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of his tent.

He will lift me high upon a rock. Here is our protection.

[21 : 42] And more than that, here is our victory. Just as Christ suffered at the hands of his enemies and even died in shame, so like David he was vindicated.

Verse 6, we read, his head will be lifted up above all his enemies, raised from the dead, never to die again. We come to the risen Christ who has overcome the world in his death and resurrection.

And united to him, we know that God will bring us safely through the spiritual opposition and the fears we now face into life and glory forever with him.

He will turn our mourning into joy. He will cause us to sing again. The resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees it. He not only replaces our fear with safety, our worry with beauty, he even replaces our disappointments with hope and ultimately he replaces our death with life.

David has prayed to gaze on the beauty of the Lord. He seeks the face of the Lord and at last in verse 13 he says very boldly, I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of

the living.

[23 : 03] Surrounded by threats and evil, he has this certain hope that the Lord would not give him up to death but keep him in the land of the living and best of all that there he would see the goodness of the Lord with his own two eyes.

Do you believe that day is coming? No matter how dark the days are we have his word that it won't be like this forever. The best is yet to come.

when all the evil of this present age is ended and all that is left for us to see is the beautiful goodness of our God.

On that day even our closest, clearest vision of the Lord in this life will seem like a blurry photo compared with the brightness and clearness and closeness that we will enjoy with him in the land of the living.

For now we see as in a mirror dimly but then face to face. Until that great day let us set our eyes and hearts on the Lord.

[24 : 12] He is the only sight for our sore eyes. His perfect love casts out fear. He is the one who has been our help. So wait for the Lord.

Be strong and let your heart take courage. Wait for the Lord. Let's pray together. Gracious and powerful God we come to ye in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for your protection and safety.

Lord we thank you that with you we have complete security if we come trusting in all that Jesus has done for us. We pray to you that as we look at his cross we see your love for us poured out.

We see that he has overcome the powers of darkness. We see that he has even overcome our sin and its penalty. Father we thank you that in him we need never fear.

We need never fear you and your judgment. We need never fear the things that we face in this life.

Lord even though wars arise against us yet we will be confident because of Jesus.

[25 : 34] Lord we pray for those who are facing fears right now perhaps that they themselves don't even understand that you would draw near and be their help. And we ask it in Jesus' great name.

Amen.