



Date: January 22, 2017

Title: "Confidence"

Scripture: Psalm 27

Description: When you feel faith and fear at the same time, how do you get the faith to come out on top? Psalm 27 offers one way: a focus on God's presence, not God's performance.

Ever felt two opposite things at once—like I do every day of the week? "It's Christmas Season! Cool—I love Christmas!" and "It's Christmas. So much more to do on top of my already too busy load." "The kids are back in school. I can have my life back!" alongside "It was nice with the kids home. I enjoy having them around."

Sometimes I feel like two different people! Isn't it weird that this one hand can do almost anything, and the other hand can't even write my own name?

That's when I turn to Psalm 27. "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold^[a] of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Bold confidence...until v. 8. "Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!" An almost panic-level anxiety attack cry of fear.

Then the very next sentence, "¹⁰If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up." My own family can turn their backs on me, but "nothing will separate me from the love of God." Unwavering faith, until the next sentence, "¹²Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence." Back and forth, back and forth, opposite emotions felt at the same time.

Psalm 27 knows all about that. This person isn't in total despair. This person isn't in the bottomless pit. He knows things aren't perfect, but things aren't a disaster either. It's one thing to feel afraid; it's another thing to live in fear. Feeling both ways about

something is very normal. When you feel both confident and afraid, how do you get confidence to come out on top?

I'm afflicted with "the impostor syndrome." I bet you are, too. It's the sense that any day now, you are going to discover how much I am bluffing. I'll be exposed as a complete smoke-and-mirrors show. Isn't that what those dreams about showing up at work in your underwear are really about? How do you get the confidence you want to meet life head on? How do you get the faith you need to truly trust in God's care?

That's what Psalm 27 is about. The writer may feel two things: confidence and fear, but he wants only one thing: to "behold the beauty of the Lord." (v. 4) One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple." Which puts him out of sync with most people today. Most of us, especially when we're in trouble, want the problem solved. We want God to do something *for* us. So we ask God to make the chemotherapy to be successful, our family to be safe during the trip, the strange sound in the car's engine to be something minor. "In Jesus' name we pray, amen." But this psalm doesn't ask God to help him succeed, win the lottery, or banish the bad guys. He only wants to be with God and enjoy the beauty. (v. 4) One thing I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple."

The thing about beauty is that it's beautiful, but it doesn't build bridges, fight disaster, or keep you warm at night. And it almost always disappears from our view when we're overworked, too busy, or in peril. Who has time to notice the sunset, to hear the song, to watch children at play when there be dragons to slay and medals to win. If the writer can get quiet enough to see beauty, his prayer for serenity is already answered. If the writer can see the beauty of the Lord, everything else is details, no matter how they work out.

But that writer is not us. The majority of us want to fix things, and the remainder of us want to make sense of things; and the number of people willing to stay around when something cannot be fixed and does not make any sense is very small. When fixing things and explaining things have done their thing, even if they work, they leave you dreading the next problem that comes along. Because it will come along.

But when you discover that being with is what you've yearned for all along, when you discover the power of presence, then you've "seen goodness in the land of the living." That is life-changing.

The English Patient won best picture in 1996. It's set in Egypt during the Second World War. A married Englishwoman, Katherine, falls in love with an impossibly attractive Hungarian, Laszlo. They begin a passionate affair.

Katherine's husband, suspecting the affair, plans a murderous revenge. He puts Katherine in the seat of his two-passenger plane and flies toward where Laszlo is working in an isolated area of the desert. As the plane descends to land and Laszlo comes out to the landing strip to meet it, it becomes clear Katherine's husband intends to land the plane right on Laszlo himself. But the vengeful plan backfires and the plane crashes, killing the husband. Laszlo sustains only minor injuries, but Katherine is badly hurt.

Now Laszlo and Katherine face an unspeakable predicament. Katherine's injuries are life-threatening. Is she is going to live, Laszlo is going to have to go find medical help. But that means going to Cairo, which is three day's walk away. It's a dangerous journey. Even if Laszlo gets there safely, he may not be able to persuade anyone to return with him to help. And there only a small chance Katherine will be alive when he gets back. What will they do? Does he leave her to probably die alone, or does he stay with her, knowing if he does she will not survive.

That's the essence of what we desire, isn't it. We want solutions, answers, ways to *fix* things. And if there's a situation that doesn't have a solution, we don't want to deal with it.

You're not going to hear anything else I say unless I tell you the end of the movie, are you? Laszlo hardly thinks twice. He sets off on the three-day journey to find help. When he returns, he finds Katherine very, very dead. He is so committed to helping that he overlooks the one thing she needed. And that is, being with her. He was so concerned to solve her problem that he overlooks her greatest need.

Psalm 27 has problems also. (v.2) "...evildoers assail me to devour my flesh" (v. 12) ..."false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence." But the psalm rises above the problems and the desire for a solution. The Psalm only asks for God to stay with.

Without questioning it, we assume that the essential problem of existence is our limitation. All those things that impose themselves into our lives and leave us feeling helpless. We can't do anything about it. The key project of society is the alleviation, overcoming, and transcendence of limitations. Every invention, every new world record in sports, every new gadget reflects our deepest desire—to overcome whatever gets in our way. For most of us, God is not someone I love, God is a service I consume.

The purpose of faith is to better meet my needs, including my ultimate need which is to master death

Psalm 27 offers a different perspective. This person believes the greatest problem is isolation. It isn't that we cannot control, it's that we need to connect. If the fundamental problem is isolation, then what we are looking for doesn't lie in the laboratory or the hospital or the frontiers of knowledge or experience. They lie in the things we already have—each other. And God with us.

So the writer, knowing his heart, puts it this way: "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, LORD, do I seek." One contemporary translation puts it this way, "My heart has heard you say, 'Come and talk with me.' And my heart responds, 'Lord, I am coming....'" That sounds so personal, so unhurried. There's a complete lack of panic in the invitation, "Come and talk with me." He doesn't ask God to fix it, solve it, or even improve it. He asks God to be with.

In the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, the twelve disciples are always getting it wrong, not understanding, and being examples of disappointment. But in the beginning of John's Gospel, two of them get it right. They are hearing Jesus teach for the first time. Afterwards Jesus asks them personally, "What are you looking for?" "Teacher," they respond, "where are you staying?" Like the writer of this Psalm, they simply wanted to be with him. And that was what he gave them.

Remember last month when we sang, "Silent night, holy night, *all is calm...*?" From the beginning of Jesus' life, there is no frenzy of activity, no hustle of accomplishment, no things that need to be finished before deadline. Yes, Jesus healed the lame, restored sight, walked on water. But underneath it all, there was his presence. He was Emmanuel. God is with us. That is our deepest yearning. It is God's deepest yearning as well.

"Your face, Lord, do I seek." "Come talk with me." How do we seek God's face? How do we behold the beauty of the Lord? It begins with paying attention. Like a bird watcher in a grove of trees, we wait. We wait, not like at the Department of Motor Vehicles, waiting for your number to be called. We wait with spring-loaded readiness, poised for that moment that suddenly becomes God-filled.

Keep your eyes open. Wait expectantly. Let Psalm 27 come true for you, as it has for so many, "I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." I assure you, from my own experience, in the presence of feeling all kinds of things at the same time, knowing God's presence is beautiful. Even if that is all you have, it is enough.

