

Fear and Trembling

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're continuing on this evening in our Summer Psalm series, and this evening we'll be looking at Psalm 27. And as I was thinking about this Psalm for this evening, I couldn't help thinking of this beautiful and kind of haunting scene in the first of the Harry Potter books, or the first of the Harry Potter movies.

And some of you are more excited than you've ever been in church right now. And maybe you probably remember this scene for those of you who have seen it, but Harry's walking around the castle late at night by himself, and he stumbles upon this mirror.

And he sees himself in this mirror, as you would expect it, he would see himself. But as he looks closer, he sees this group of people standing behind him. And Harry, for those of you who haven't read the books or seen the movies, Harry is was, or in this world, is an orphan.

And he lost his parents to an accident when he was just young. And as he stared into the mirror, he realized that he began to see himself, see his features, see his eyes and resemblance in this group of people that stood behind him.

And he realizes it was his mom, it was his dad, and they're smiling approvingly at him. And his mom's even crying, she's so excited to see him.

[1 : 1 9] And he'd never seen them before, and they're waving at him and smiling at him. And as you can imagine, Harry gets as close to the mirror as he possibly can. He's pushing his nose up against it, and Rowling says he stares hungrily at them.

And after hours of just staring at his parents, he decides he better return to bed because he's sneaking around before he gets caught. And he whispers, I'll come back to his family, and he sneaks off back to bed.

And of course, the next day he tells his friend Ron, eager to bring him along to introduce Ron to his family and to meet Ron's family, because apparently this is just a family mirror where you meet people's families.

And all day long, you can imagine how long this day is for Harry. He just longs for the night to come. He longs for everyone to go to bed so that he can see his family again.

He doesn't eat, he doesn't do his schoolwork. Everything that was important to him now is irrelevant to him. And finally, everyone goes to bed. And the two sneak off to see the mirror, and Harry steps in front of it, and there's his mom and his dad staring back at him, waving at him, smiling at him.

[2 : 3 0] And he pulls his friend Ron over, there's my parents, do you see them? And Ron can't see them. And so Ron gets in front of the mirror to get a better look at them, and his mouth drops open.

He doesn't see Harry's family. He doesn't even see his own family. Turns out this isn't just the family mirror. He sees himself, except he's older. He's the head boy of the school.

He has a badges. He has awards on him. He's the captain of the Quidditch team. You see, this mirror showed them, wasn't their families, it wasn't their futures, and it didn't even show them what they wanted, as Dumbledore would explain to Harry.

It shows, as he says, nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts. Whether you've read Harry Potter or not, whether you like Harry Potter or not, this psalm is in some way a mirror.

In some ways it's asking you not just what you want, but what is the deepest, what is the most desperate desire of your heart? Or as Jesus asked so pointedly in the Gospels, what are you seeking?

[3 : 38] And were that mirror to be over here in this back this evening, and you were to go look in it afterward, what would you see? What would show up in the mirror?

Would you see a beautiful church with wedding bells? Would you see a little healthy baby? Would you see your grown children walking with the Lord? Would you see grandchildren walking with the Lord?

Would you see a big corner office with a big salary? Would you see a graduation day finally come with a diploma that says with honors on it? Would you see a life filled with leisure, life filled with friends?

And I want the majority of those things for myself. It's not bad to want those things. But the question is, are those the deepest, the most desperate desire of your heart this evening?

Because as Dumbledore warned Harry, men have wasted away before that mirror. They've stared into it for so long, wanting those things. They've wasted away, entranced by what they've seen or driven mad by what they just can't seem to get their hands around.

[4 : 47] And I think we all know here this evening that's what good desires can so easily become for us. We can be driven mad by them because we just have to have them, our fists clench around them.

So I think if David were here this evening, he would ask you, what do you really, what do you really, really, really, really want? What do you truly want? And if David were to look into that mirror, he would see not just rescue from his enemies, he wouldn't just see his foes tripping as they pursued him.

He wouldn't just see security to his kingdom. He would see, according to Psalm 27, the very face of God in that mirror. And in verse four, if you look at it, he says, I just want one thing.

I just want one thing. I have one prayer. And I seek after that with everything, everything that I have. And it's you, Lord. It's your face. That's what I'm seeking after.

And if you look in verse eight, he says, you know, it's not just my mouth that says this. I don't just say this in church so that people will think that I'm holy. What did he say? He says, my heart. My heart says this reality.

[5 : 54] My heart says to you, God, please show me your face, Lord. Can I just see your face? You see, this isn't a show for David. This is a prayer.

This is a desperation that he has. Something he tells the Lord in the quiet of his room. This isn't a public performance. This is the posture of his heart before the Lord when he's alone and no one else is watching.

In other words, as Dumbledore might put it, this is the deepest, most desperate desire of David's heart is to see the face of the Lord. And I think that all of us this evening, I think we all want that to be the deepest desire of our hearts.

But if we're honest, it's just not always. And I think one of the reasons it's not is because our hearts are so often paralyzed by other things. Our hearts get crowded out with voices, other voices that just crowd out that desire.

And that's what tonight I want to talk about. What does it mean for the Lord to be our deepest hunger, our deepest, deepest, deepest desire, even in the midst of all those voices that are shouting, that are whispering, that are crowding out our hearts?

[7 : 07] Three voices that try to paralyze your heart. That's what this sermon will be about. Three different voices. And the first voice, if you look at Psalm 27, is fear.

If you look at verse one, David says, whom shall I fear? Whom shall I fear? He asked a question twice. And the answer actually seems pretty obvious.

I think I could answer that question for him pretty easily. He has plenty of people and things to be afraid of. There are the evil doers who are chasing him down. He has adversaries.

He has foes coming after him. There are armies and wars waiting for him. Yet, in the midst of all that noise, in the midst of all that, he says in verse three, to his own heart, my heart shall not fear.

I will somehow be confident in the midst of all of this. And my guess is if you were to open this up tomorrow morning, that would feel pretty unrelatable to you.

[8 : 07] As I hope you don't have armies camped outside of your front door or enemies stalking around in your garden coming for you. And if you do, you should talk to someone here at church. We can help you with that, maybe.

But the reality is David did. David did have armies camped against him. He really did have wars coming for him. And again, like we talked about last week, what situation in particular this is, we don't really know.

But we can at least say two things for sure about what David was going through. We can say two things for sure. Number one, he says, the Lord is my light. That's what he says in the first verse.

So we can say pretty confidently whatever his situation was, it felt dark to him. It was a dark situation. And the second thing we can say is David says my heart shall not fear.

So whatever situation this was, it was dark and David was scared. To say to your heart, do not be afraid that many times means you're struggling with fear.

[9 : 09] In other words, David's reality and David's theology were coming into conflict with each other. He looked outside of his tent or whatever he was staying in and saw a plane filled with armies and enemies coming for him.

He saw enemies chasing him down, coming after him, wanting his life. And then he looked into the law of God at a God that said, I want to be your God and I want you to be my people and I will care for you.

And so he's trying to reconcile what he sees with his eyes and what he reads in the word of God. And he's trying to teach himself. He's trying to teach his eyes. He's trying to teach his heart, his emotions to see the world through the letters of the Bible, to see the world theologically.

And how does he do that? If you look at verse one, he says, the Lord is my light. The Lord is my salvation.

The Lord is the stronghold of my life. In other words, the Lord is mine. It's almost as if he puts handles on the character and attributes of God and he claims him as his own.

[10 : 24] He pulls God and all of his character into his own situation. And he says, the Lord is mine. He's mine today. He's mine in this tent. And in the midst of these enemies and these wars, he's mine.

When it's dark, the Lord is my light. When I'm running from my enemy and the thing I need the most is a place to hide. He's my stronghold and my refuge.

When evil doers are chasing me, he'll push them over for me. In other words, David's prayer is, God, be who you are to me. All of who you are and your attributes and might and power be who you are to me right now in the midst of this.

I need you. Be mine. And what does that mean? What does that mean for us? It means that in the dark, you need theology and even more literally.

And of course, you're going to hear this from a guy who likes theology, but it means that you need a systematic theology book by your bed. Not just to help you fall asleep, because when you are afraid, you need more than a song to pick you up.

[11 : 30] You need more than a TV show to distract you. You actually need content to begin to fill your mind. You need content to fight your fears. You need content to fill your mind and your heart and your affections.

You need to understand who God actually is and who he is for you. You need to read who he is and put handles on that and say, be who you are to me, God, and pull God into your fears.

You need Genesis one. As you read Genesis one, you need it ringing in your head that said, when God said, let there be light, and you need to have a view of God that says, God, say that into my darkness.

Be who you are to me. Let there be light in this dark situation. When David does that, if you look at verse one again, when he does that, his questions that are in verse one become answers in verse three.

You see the question marks go away as you move from verse one to verse three. Question marks become periods. We find that this is the true secret to confidence.

[12 : 42] The more your brain internalizes who God is and what he is for you, a quiet confidence will begin to settle into your life. There is no other way to get that confidence because you will realize how much bigger and deeper and stronger God is than the evil doers chasing after you or the worries of your day.

When you rest all of who you are and the promises of God personalized into your own soul and situation and fears, then you can say in an anxious situation, God is not just peace, God is my peace.

You can say the Lord is mine and all of who he is. What that means is that your week, this week, your day tomorrow, the primary things it needs is not more of you but more of God.

It needs God himself and that reality will change the way you live and the way you think and the way you pray because that means you need to know who God is so that you know who you're asking for in your day.

You know what attributes to pull over and to rest upon. Your whole life rests upon those things. If the first voice is fear, the second voice that will try to distract you from that one prayer is guilt.

[13 : 57] It's guilt. Look in verse nine. David cries out, Lord, don't hide your face from me. Look at the next line. Don't send me away in anger.

Please. Look at the next line. Cast me not off. Forsake me not. And the reality should set in that the one thing David wants, the one prayer that he has more than any other prayer to behold the very face of God is the thing that he's most disqualified to do.

He has too much blood on his hands. He has too much lust in his eyes and he has too much guilt in his heart to be able to behold the very face of God.

And as he prays, Lord, let me see your face. God, I just want to see the beauty of your face. His heart shouts back at it. It whispers at sometimes and shouts and rings him and it says, what makes you think God would ever look your way?

What makes you think that the Lord would ever turn his face towards you? And you can hear David wrestling with the fear that God might never turn toward him, that if he were to turn, there might be anger on his face, that God might turn and walk away from him because of what he's done, and that if David were to just catch a glimpse of God's face, it might be one of disappointment.

[15 : 26] It might be one of anger. And so in verse 7, David asks for more than I think he knows that he's asking for.

What does he ask for? He says, Lord, would you just be gracious? Would you, in all of who you are, is there grace in you? You who are my light and my stronghold and my fortress and my protector and who never change.

You who have been everything else to me. He's seen his justice upon enemies and he's seen his wrath and he says, is there a way that there would be grace, that there would be mercy in you toward me?

The reality is, if I can speak on behalf of you all, which I never want to do, but it's that none of us in this room by default actually believe that God loves us.

We don't by default believe that God actually loves us. John Owen in his book, Communion with God, put it this way. He said, men are afraid to have good thoughts of God.

[16 : 31] We're afraid to have good thoughts of God. And we have to ask the question, why? Why are we so afraid to have good thoughts of God? And if the answer, there's a ton of answers to that, but the most simple foundational answer is, because that's what Satan wants for you.

He would love nothing more to convince all of you, and he's probably done it in seasons of your life that God doesn't actually love you.

And he's done it. Remember the parable of Luke 19 of the 10 minas of the first two servants who were entrusted by their master with differing levels of money and they invested and they do different things with it.

And he comes back and says, what have you done with my money? And he rewards them for investing it. In the third one, what does he say? He says, I didn't do anything with it.

Why didn't he do anything with it? He says, I was afraid. I was afraid of you. Why was he afraid? He said, because your heart is harsh, because you're cruel, and that fear of you paralyzed me.

[17 : 39] I couldn't do anything because I was afraid that you would come back and be angry, terrified to do the wrong thing, to take the wrong step because you're harsh. And he realized that that heart breaks Jesus' heart more than anything else because he knows the Father.

And for someone to think that about the person he knows breaks his heart. And the crazy thing about that is if there's one word that's always tied to the Father in the New Testament, John Olin points this out in communion with God, it's the word love.

Just listen to a few verses. I'll just read them off for you. He, the Father, loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Next verse, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace is tied to the person of Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

In other words, grace is tied to Christ, love to the Father, and fellowship to the Holy Ghost. I'm not trying to split apart the Trinity here and doing something heretical. I'm just saying love is tied to the Father.

[18 : 46] And Jesus himself says, I say not unto you that I will pray to the Father for you. He says, I'm not actually going to pray to the Father for you. Why?

Because the Father himself loves you. Jesus who knew the Father from all eternity said, I don't even have to pray to him for you because he already loves you. I know him better than anyone else and he loves you.

And the most simple, God is love of all the things that are said about the members of the Trinity. Love is almost always given to the Father.

And John Owen points that out beautifully in his book, Communion with God, if you want to read more. And I think we all know here this evening, one of the worst things that you could ever do to a friend or that could ever be done of you is to speak poorly.

Is someone were to speak poorly about you to other people? It's to tarnish their characters, to speak in a way that doesn't represent them and misconstrues them so that people think poorly of you.

[19 : 49] And isn't that what Satan does every single moment of every single day? And it's to speak poorly to you about the Father. It's to get us to believe that God isn't the one thing that his word says over and over again that he is and that's love.

And so our entire lives become a battle now. It's a battle. It's the battle to believe the word of God rather than our hearts.

And that's my long explanation for why we need theology books by your bed. Because your own heart or emotions or imagination won't lead you to the truth, no matter how creative or in touch with your emotions you are.

They'll actually lead you in the opposite direction. And isn't that what faith is? It's deciding that the word of God is your truth, even when your heart tells you otherwise, even when the enemy is outside of your tent to tell you otherwise, even when there's armies telling you otherwise, it's deciding God is who he says he is.

And that is a really scary way to live. I think if David were here, he would say, you know what? I've faced the enemies. I've faced the armies.

[21 : 02] I've ran away from them. And you know what the hardest thing to do for my own heart is? The hardest thing to do, there's nothing to do with enemies, it's to believe that God is love toward me, that God would love me in the midst of my sinfulness.

Even when my heart screams otherwise and whispers otherwise, it's to pray, God, would you be loved to me? Would you be gracious to me?

And David does that in the midst of his guilt, in the midst of Satan trying to convince him of the anger and disappointment and abandonment of God. David, what does he do? He grabs his heart by the collar and he says, you listen to me, I'll do the talking now.

You've preached to me for long enough. I'm the preacher now. Heart, God, verse eight, told you, seek his face. Heart, that's what God has told you to do. Now you do it.

Heart, God is urging you, pleading with you. Ask to see my face. And Satan would do anything, anything to get none of us in this room to pray that prayer.

[22 : 07] God show me your face. So he convinces you that if you were to ask for that, you'd see a face that would be upset, angry, disappointed, and yet God still, his word has not moved.

It still says to everyone here this evening, ask me. Ask to see my face because who I am is love.

My word has told you this and I will be that towards you. And so David says confidently, Lord, be gracious to me.

You've been everything else to me. Would you be gracious to me now? Because in essence, that's the same prayer as turn your face toward me, God. And look where this leads him, look at verse 10.

It leads him to say that even when my father and my mother forsake me, you will take me in, Lord.

[23 : 08] And I don't think the main point of that verse is that David is saying his father and his mother forsook him. They may have, but I don't think that's the main point of what he's getting at.

The point is more obvious. Parents here, you know, most parents would never turn their children away. I know my parents, I live on the other side of the world from them now.

If I were to show up at three in the morning, the doors open for me. A meal will be made for me. We know this. Parents will believe in their children.

They'll answer when you call. Parents will believe in you. They'll root for you. They'll make you a hot dinner. And if I want to say that carefully, because there might be some in this room who their parents no longer do that for them.

And that relationship might be fragmented. And this verse still applies to you, and actually it applies to you even more beautifully. Because I think David's point is that even past the point that your parents would give up on you and start closing the door, as long as it would take for that to happen, God would still open the door and say, you come in still child.

[24 : 22] I'll still take you. He'll still take me in. And isn't that a beautiful picture? And so you can see what this psalm is really doing is it's not only telling you, seek the face of God, but it's telling you this is what God's face will look like when he turns towards you.

He's painting a picture of God's face for you. David's heart tells him one thing, that God's face is angry, disappointed, tired of him.

And so he's preaching to his heart. No, no, God told me to come. God told me to come home. God will always open the door for me, always.

God will say, welcome home, my boy. Welcome home, my daughter. You'll make a meal. And if you think that's too emotional, imaginative language, that's basically the same language that Jesus used to describe the Father as well.

And that's the way that David talks about it too. The third and final voice that tries to pull your heart away from this one prayer isn't as obvious, but it's even more central.

[25 : 33] And it's the idea of beauty. Look back at verse four. David's prayer that he's hanging onto through fear, through guilt, is that he would see God's face.

But it's actually more than that. It's more specific. Look at the actual verse. It's that he would gaze upon the beauty, the beauty of the Lord.

I think if David were here, this is the question that he would ask you. How do you see the Lord? How do you view him?

Is he useful to you? In other words, is he useful to fixing your marriage or fixing that naggy struggle with sin that you have, that you've been trying to shake?

Does he give you a new purpose and a new meaning and new objectives to go after? Is he your get out of hell free card? Is he genealogical?

[26 : 36] Is he someone that your family has always worshiped, your grandparents have worshiped? This is just what we do as a family, as we come to church.

I think it was John Piper, I don't know for sure, who phrased it this way. He said, if you could have an eternity of recreation, of family, of food, of freedom from sin, of pleasure, of a beautiful earth to explore, of all the hobbies and all the resources you could ever want, big house, but if Jesus weren't there, would you still want that?

Does your heart say along with David, take whatever you want from me, but verse 8, I need to see Jesus?

There are new worship songs, at least in America, hopefully they don't find their way over, but they incorrectly, and I'm not recommending them, but they say that Jesus was needy for us, he didn't want heaven without us, he was lonely, he needed us in heaven, but would we want heaven without Jesus?

Are we as a church more interested in cultural relevance and financial stability and mission, planting, growth? None of those things are bad, but are those the true desire of our hearts, even more than seeing the face of God?

[28 : 06] See, the Lord is urging us as a church, St. Columbus, seek my face. Do our hearts say, your face, oh Lord, do I seek?

And the only way we'll do it is not if we find Jesus useful or motivational or practical or what our family does, but if we find him beautiful. And what is a beautiful thing?

What does it mean to be beautiful? It's just something that we want to look at. Those flowers in your kitchen are not helping pay the bills, they have not fixed a leaky pipe, I don't know, pipe.

They're not motivation for anybody, they're just beautiful, you just like them there. And there's a helpful test for what you find beautiful, it's what you think about when you can think about anything at all, what does your mind go to?

Maybe for those of you who were married when you first met your spouse, you just thought about them. Maybe for those who aren't married, it's when you first met a best friend or found a new hobby that just brightens your life, you just thought about it, you just liked it.

[29 : 16] And if someone were to ask you why you thought about that person or that thing, it would almost seem a silly question, you almost wouldn't even know how to answer it, you'd just say because, I just want to be with them, I just like them, okay, I just like doing that thing.

And for those who are married, maybe when you are planning your honeymoon, or if you think about planning your honeymoon, and someone said, you know what, you can have the perfect hotel on the perfect white sand beach with all you can eat and all the amenities and all the resources and whatever you want, the one catch is that your spouse can't come.

I think we would all say, no thanks, I'll take the motel or the shabby place somewhere else because that person is the center of gravity for your life.

And that's how we treat beautiful things. In other words, to see God as beautiful is to say, God, would you just be there? God, if you're there, you can take care of everything else around me, would you just show up and everything else will work itself out?

And isn't that what Jesus said, he said, seek first the kingdom of God, and I'll take care of everything else. And isn't that what Jesus lived?

[30 : 37] Isn't that what he did for us? Didn't Jesus say the words of this psalm actually, if you think about his life, if you look at the psalm, remember the words that he's actually said of this.

When he was just a boy and his parents lost him on their return trip from Jerusalem and they find him in the temple and ask where he's been, what does he say? He responds with the words of this psalm, didn't you know that I would be in my father's house?

Didn't you know that I would be inquiring in his temple? I just want to be in my father's house. And as evil doers assailed him and chased him and foes, hung on every word to try to snare him and hook him, he just slipped away to be with the father at night.

He just slipped away from the crowds to go be with the father. And as his head was lifted above his enemies upon a rock, as it says they wagged their mouths at him and mocked him, what did he do?

He offered himself up as a sacrifice and sung a psalm. He sung quietly the words of Psalm 22 to the Lord. And a sin bored down on his very soul and conscience, he pleaded with the Lord not to forsake him.

[31 : 50] Don't leave me, don't turn your face away. And even as his own family, his mothers and brothers lost faith in him, he slipped away to hear the words of his father, you are my boy, you're my boy, you're my son, I'm proud of you.

And as he was burdened with sorrows, he told his soul to wait for the father, to be strong and to wait. And in that moment when he's lifted upon the rock, he did see the wrath of God, the face turned, the face of God turned toward him in wrath so that when the face of God turns towards you, you'll see a smile, you'll see joy and delight because it doesn't have to turn in wrath again if you're in Christ.

So in conclusion, what is it you truly, truly, truly, truly, truly want? If you were in front of that mirror, what would you see? Is it to see the face of God?

Because he says to you this evening, seek my face. In Psalm 27, it's a second person plural, all of you, seek my face. And David says, I'll seek your face.

So God says to all of you, seek my face. And it's the job of your heart to say, I'll seek his face. I want to see his face. How will you respond?

[33 : 11] What is it that you want? Let me pray for us. Father, we do want to see your face.

Lord, we want to see the beauty of your face. And Lord, I pray that the power and the beauty of your word would overcome and silence the fears that crowd our hearts and the guilt that crowds our hearts.

And the fight for beauty that we want to use you sometimes and more than we just want to behold your glory and your beauty. Lord, would you forgive us?

Would you cleanse us from unrighteousness? Thank you that you sung this song ahead of us, that when the face of the Father turned toward you in wrath, it doesn't have to turn toward us in wrath because of that.

I pray that your spirit would work, that it would apply this word, and that we would be known as a group of people more than anything else that we're known for who are known first and foremost as a group of people that said, we want to see the face of God.

[34 : 23] I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.