

Single -- Minded And Consistent

by Steve Zeisler

If I had to choose the one verse in Scripture that has challenged and helped me most it would be verse 4 of Psalm 27. This is the one verse of Scripture I've had framed; it hangs on a wall in my study.

Psalm 27, verse 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.**

This statement is found in the middle of the passage we will cover this morning, the first six verses of Psalm 27. Last week we looked at the second part of the psalm, verses 7 through 14. We saw that those verses were, first, a plaintive and deeply -- felt cry to God by David the King because he felt forsaken; and second, a plea to God to teach him, because David realized that he could not handle life on his own. As we said last week, one of the striking characteristics of Psalm 27 is that David utters in the same breath a deeply-felt call for God to rescue him in his hurt, together with a beautiful statement praising God that speaks of the certainty of God's authority and sovereignty in David's life. The fact that David believed both of those things at the same time speaks of his maturity.

This morning, therefore, we will look at the opening verses of Psalm 27, where David sings the praises of his God.

**The Lord is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the defense of my life;
Whom shall I dread
When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh,
My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.
Though a host encamp against me,
My heart will not fear;
Though war arise against me,
In spite of this I shall be confident.
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.
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.
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.**

In verses 1--3 David says that God's power is unassailable, his authority is unchallengeable: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" "Whom could I possibly name as an opponent of the one whom God favors?" asks David. "Can any opponent even have the slightest chance?" David does not compare God's power in the world, God's battling with the forces of evil in the world, in terms of, say, a football game between two fairly evenly-matched teams. David asks, "Who could possibly stand in opposition to my God?"

David goes on to speak about how God met his need when he faced enemies in the past. He calls some of his enemies "devourers." Like us, David experienced pain that was close-up and personal. People ripped at him,

tore at him and used him; people who were close to him tried to take advantage of him. At other times the problems confronting him seemed to him like a war breaking over his head; all the circumstances of life seemed to work against him. But, David says, whatever the problem, whatever the enemy, whatever the difficulty, his God is greater than all of them. "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?"

It is hard for some of us with our New Testament experience to know how to relate to David's statements about his enemies. We are told to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, so we very often struggle in knowing precisely how to equate David's description of his political and military foes with anything we experience. But our struggle may be because of our geographic location. There are places in this world today-- in Islamic, in Marxist countries-- where the enemies of the kingdom of God, those who are set against the will of God, are using political and military power to crush Christians. If we are puzzled by David's statements about his enemies, where we live may be more of a factor than the times we are living in.

More often, our enemies are the salesmen of ideas and philosophies, the purveyors of a lifestyle committed to adoration of self; the people who say that your first love should be the acquisition of power, money, security, thrills, pleasure, tranquility-- anything but righteousness. Francis Schaeffer says that our age is committed to personal peace and affluence, not godliness. So, rather than confronting military and political enemies of the truth, our enemies are the purveyors of the ideas that allure those we love, even we ourselves, to believe their lies.

Let's look behind what's apparent about our enemies. In discussing verse 12 of this psalm last week, where David described his enemies as "false witnesses and such as breathe out violence," we said that that statement is very much in line with Jesus' statement in the New Testament about his enemies. Addressing those who were trying to kill him, Jesus said, "You are of your father the devil. He is a murderer and a liar." I think David knew intuitively what we know because of the word of Scripture-- that behind every human being who is destructive, every human being who would hurt us, every human being opposed to the cause of God, stands the final enemy. Human servants of Satan are dupes, ultimately. We can love them; we should pity them. The enemy they represent is the one towards whom our antagonism should be directed-- the murderer and liar himself. When David faced military enemies I believe he intuitively knew that the one his hatred ought to burn against was their leader, not those who were marching in armies against him. When we in our day encounter wickedness in our world we ought to be able to forgive its proponents and hate its origin.

A friend of mine who moved into this area not too long ago unknowingly bought a condominium that had irreparable structural damage. The selfish and heartless man who sold her this condominium took advantage of this woman who was on her own. By lying and cheating he wrung every dollar he could out of the deal. Only when legal threats and pressure were exerted did this man even consider rectifying the misrepresentations he had made about the home he had sold. But my friend, to her great credit, not only was righteously indignant but she felt sorry for him. She realized that he was more of a victim than she. So when we read these psalms that speak of antagonism toward enemies, we need to realize that although human enemies may deserve our righteous indignation, nevertheless the one we ought to hate and war against is the power behind the throne, behind the origin of these things-- Satan.

Verses 1 through 3, then, are David's reflections on the no-- contest situation that exists between his great God and those who are David's enemies, those who are attacking him. David is convinced that God is supremely in authority; God's power is unchallengeable

In verse 4 we now see a very important that start to happen in David's life. Because he knows how -- treat his God is a very -- treat faith grows in him. The magnificence of his Lord led David to hunger for a magnificent response: a mature, godly, righteous faith in God. This is described in verse 4:

**One thing I have asked form 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.**

David's request to dwell in the house of the Lord is accompanied by diligent seeking, because this request

matters very much to him. To me the most striking words in that psalm are the two little three-letter adjectives, "one," and "all." "One thing, only one, I have asked from the Lord," David says. "I am no-- a double-- minded man. I don't want to love God and love the world too. If the Lord will grant this one request then he may deny me everything else and I will still be happy. I am single-minded in my longing." And he asks that he may be blessed with this all the days of his life. "My desire is not going to fade with time," David says. "It is not something that I feel only now and again, on religious holidays, etc. This is an everyday, all the days of my life, forever kind of longing." David is singleminded: he wants only one thing; and he is consistent: he wants this thing all the days of his life.

Let us examine this for just a moment before we look more directly at the request itself. How does David's single mindedness sound compared to the spirit of this age? One thing that really characterizes our day is the desire for change. Change jobs, diversify your investments, we are told. Only backward and ignorant people are content with one wife or one husband for a lifetime, we hear. Consider the variety available and move on to the next thing- a new hobby, a new place, a new car, the latest fad, the next opportunity.

The Scriptures are very clear, however, that we really are fools if we live our lives questing for new things all the time. The quest we ought to be involved in is seeking the one thing that is worth living for and then be as devoted to it as we possibly can; to seek the one Foundation that will remain and then stand there and refuse to be moved. The world says diversify, but the Scriptures hold up devotion as the height of wisdom. This one thing is what David tenaciously sought all the days of his life.

In the New Testament Mary, the sister of Martha, is commended by our Lord because she rose above the clamor of the household, all the chores that needed to be done, not wondering what her friends would think, etc., to sit at the feet of her Master. She chose the best and it will not be taken from her, Jesus said. Mary stands in contrast to a man named Demas, who is described later, in Paul's writings. Even though there was a time when Demas served the Lord, at the end his epitaph, the last mention of him in Scripture is this, "Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me. " (2 Tim. 4:10) Mary chose the best part, which would not be taken from her; Demas allowed himself to be seduced away.

Let me mention another attack upon this single-minded devotion that David describes here. Many of us find ourselves able to resist the more overt influences of the world, but a more difficult a more subtle influence is the appeal to Christian "busyness," to religious fervor and activity. In this sphere we find that we are no longer single-- minded, we no longer have one guiding devotion in our life.

Here are a couple of paragraphs I clipped from an article written to pastors by Eugene Peterson:

The word busy is the symptom not of commitment but of betrayal. It is not devotion but defection. The adjective busy set as a modifier to pastor should sound to our ears like adulteress to characterize a wife or embezzling to characterize a banker. It is an outrageous scandal, a blphemous affront. Hilary of Tours diagnosed our pastoral busyness as a blamphemous anxiety to do God's work for him.

Speaking about prayer in the same article, Peterson says:

I know it takes time to develop a life of prayer: set- aside, disciplined, deliberate time. It isn't accomplished on the run, nor by offering prayers from a pulpit or at a hospital bedside. I know I can't be busy and pray at the same time. I can be active and pray; I can work and pray; but I cannot be busy and pray. I cannot be inwardly rushed, distracted or dispersed. In order to pray I have to be paying more attention to God than to what people are saying to me; more attention to God than to my own clamoring ego.

Sometimes our desire for the one thing that is worth having is dissipated by pure busyness. But David calls out in his prayer against both worldliness and busyness: "I only want one thing." David's single-mindedness is matched by his consistency. His longing will last all the days of his life.

I went to a high school football game this week which brought back some memories of my own experiences as

a high school football player. I remember one week in my life before an important game which would decide the championship of our league, when I had a white-- hot desire to beat South Pasadena High School. This desire to win really mattered to me but it didn't last. Today that desire is a faded, rather quaint kind of memory. It burned hot for a time but then it faded, as it should. I would have been crazy to have allowed something like that to continue inside me week after week, month after month. But David is saying here that his unwavering desire to dwell in the house of the Lord is always appropriate.

Some people ridicule religious concern and spiritual conviction by saying that such things are only for kids and old people -- for those who are too young to know better or too old and feeble to do anything better. You are considered a fanatic if you have a love for God that will not fade with time. In this regard, David is a fanatic.

What is it then that David is asking for when he says, "One thing I have asked from the Lord . . . that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life?" I would like to suggest an alternative rendering of that phrase which is a little closer in application to our day and age. David is saying that he wants to be at home in the presence of God. The "house of the Lord," the tabernacle in David's day, was a place where Jews went when their desire was to be face-to-face with God. Although their style of worship allowed them to speak of God being in a place, it must have been clear to them, as it is certainly clear to us, that God does not reside solely in any particular location. God is no more present in a church building, in the Holy Land or anywhere else, than he is in all the other places of the universe because God is everywhere all at once.

To be in God's presence is to have an attitude of appreciation and delight, tasting and seeing that the Lord is good. God's face is toward us at all times but we have a choice about whether we will face him or not. We can choose whether or not we will rejoice because of him, seek to learn from him and come to recognize his handiwork in the events of our lives and in the world he has made. For some people nearness to God is frightening; for others it is irrelevant. David longed to be at home in the presence of God.

Where do you find you are most at home in this world? What does being "at home" mean to you? Aren't you at home where you are most free to be yourself, where you are most comfortable, where you are most secure, where you have the most freedom to be honest about who you really are? We are at home where our roots are the deepest, where we know we belong and where we can most be ourselves.

My parents have moved at least twice in the years since I left their home to be on my own. They now live in a condominium. Most of the furniture I grew up familiar with is now gone, having been replaced by new furniture. Yet, despite all the changes, when I walk into my parents house I feel at home. I can go to the refrigerator and help myself without having to ask anybody. I can put my feet up on the coffee table. I don't feel I have to make a good impression any more. (I have given up trying: they know me too well!) I have a real freedom to be who I am, to talk about things I like to talk about, to listen to other people and just be relaxed. I think that is what David is asking for here. He is saying, "The place I want to be most at home, most comfortable, most real, most secure, the place I know I will be certain I belong in is when I am face-- to-- face with the Lord, when I am in the very presence of God. That is what I am asking for. That is the single -- minded, consistent request of my heart-- that God will make me more and more at home in his presence."

Finally, David tells us that there are two kinds of satisfaction that are related to this desire to be at home in the presence of God; and there are two kinds of protection he describes that grow from it. God has made us creatures who are capable of feeling. We can respond with joy and enthusiasm and great feeling about many things. And God made us that way because he himself is beautiful. In the presence of God, David says, he will "behold the beauty of the Lord." David is saying that every emotional longing he has, his every desire to feel and experience will be met by the person of God.

Then, secondly, David says, "I will meditate in God's temple. I have been given a mind, intellectual capacity, as well. I have been given curiosity about the way things are. I have been given a desire to learn, a longing to find out about things, and that comes from God. In meditating or inquiring in the temple of God I will find that the needs of my mind are also met."

Bible-- believing Christians are often accused of being anti -- intellectual book burners. (This accusation may actually be appropriate in some quarters.) But people who really have a sense of the Scriptures, people whose

faith is founded on the Book ought never to be anti-- intellectual, ought never be opposed to men learning and growing and understanding. Jesus said, "I am the truth." The further we penetrate in our endeavor to find out what is true the more likely we are to encounter God. There is a place for righteous opposition to what Paul calls "the wisdom of this world." But the humble desire to know is God-- given. It will lead us to him.

There is therefore a two-- fold satisfaction that comes from the mature longing that David feels. Our emotional life will be satisfied by the beauty of God, and our intellectual desires will be satisfied by meditating or inquiring in his temple.

Then, in verses 5 and 6, David says that there are two kinds of protection that grow out of this desire. "There are times," David says, "when God will conceal me in his tabernacle." David is describing times in his life when he was not taken out of the battle, when the hurt, the struggle and the pressure of life cut him very deeply. God refused to remove him from the pain, yet somehow, by his Spirit, he covered David's heart-- of-- hearts. We too experience such times in our lives when God conceals the inner man; he protects and grants us peace even in the midst of turmoil.

A recent example of that was John Edrington, our good brother who was an elder in this church for years. John suffered with cancer over a long battle of several months before finally succumbing. His body hurt; the prognosis of what he would have to face worsened every day; the medicine he had to take hurt him almost as much as the cancer itself. Yet his heart was protected all the while. Even though the outer man was wasting away, the inner man was being concealed, being held up. David tells us there will be times like that in our lives.

But David also says there will be days when God will set us on a rock, when we will sing the praises of God as loudly as we want to, knowing that our enemies cannot touch us. We will be removed by the hand of God from the difficult circumstances. God will sovereignly move in and take care of things. He will set us on the high ground. The rejoicing, the outpouring of praise that will result from that is described by David at the end of verse 5 and in verse 6.

In verses 1 through 6 of Psalm 27 David sings a song of praise to God. First, David says forthrightly that his God is greater than any enemy he can conceive of. David has seen and is convinced of God's protection against the devourers, against the battles, the wars, that descend on us in large measure. And because he knows how great his God is, David finds awakening in his own heart a greatness of faith, a mature longing which is tenacious, single-- minded and consistent throughout all his life. Knowing this brings about both emotional and intellectual satisfaction, as well as protection, in David's life. May God grant that our hearts' desire too will be to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives.

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Second Message
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