

**THE PEOPLE WHO FEAR THE LORD**

Psalm 119:73-80

**Intro:** The fear of the Lord is a subject of great importance in Scripture.

To fear the Lord is not to live in terror of what the Lord may do next. It is not to fear Him like the Iraqi people feared Saddam Hussein. To fear the Lord is to recognize that He is God, that He is a good and loving God, to honor Him as God, and to live in submission to Him and to His will. People who truly fear the Lord, fear that they might displease Him because they love Him so much.

The writer of Psalm 119 mentioned the fear of the Lord in verse 38. He mentioned it again in verse 63. Now in this tenth stanza he mentioned it twice: in vv. 74 and 79. This is one of the most prominent ways by which the people of God are described, both in the NT as well as in the OT. When you begin to be aware of this word connected with the Lord, you see it everywhere. It can only be applied to those who really know the Lord. The world is not concerned about knowing God. Nor are those in the world concerned about pleasing God, or obeying Him. If they were they would not do the things that they do. You can tell a person who fears the Lord by the way he or she lives.

But there is another idea to be noticed in this term, those who fear the Lord. It is obvious in verse 63, and again in the two verses in which it is found here in stanza 10: vv. 74 and 79. The idea in these verses is that the person who fears the Lord, is not alone. He belongs to a great fellowship of believers described to the Lord as “they that fear Thee.” This is what binds our hearts together in the Lord. We have one great objective in life, one great goal: to please and glorify the Lord. And we are united in that goal.

Every believer needs to learn to know the Lord and to walk with the Lord by himself, or herself. We need to learn to be individually strong in the Lord. We need to stand alone if necessary. But one of the great sources of strength that we have as the people of God, is the fellowship that we enjoy together. How encouraging it is to meet with the people of God, those who really love the Lord, and love His Word, and who are seeking to live for His glory. If suddenly we were moved to some area where we could not find a group of believers in a church where we could have fellowship, we would miss that fellowship terribly. The Lord indicated how important we are to each other because when He sent His disciples

out, He sent them two and two. I like to swim, but it is not uncommon at all when going to a place to swim to see a warning: "Do not swim alone." Why is that? Because you can have trouble swimming, and if you do, you need someone to help you. When Paul went on his missionary journeys, he always had a Barnabas or a Silas, or a Timothy, or a Luke. Moses had his Aaron. David had his Jonathan. But in the greater sense, in the OT you have the nation Israel; in the NT you have the Church, the body of Christ, and local churches where people who fear the Lord can get together for fellowship. But this one ingredient is what holds us together: we fear the Lord!

This is what seems to bring joy to the heart of the Psalmist in this particular stanza. Look at verses 74 and 79 again. We need to be sure that this is the basis of our fellowship here at Trinity. People who fear the Lord do not mix well with those who do not fear the Lord. You will find many professing Christians who do not live like this. They may go to church to be entertained, or to have fun, but not to worship the Lord, to learn of Him, and to be strengthened for those times when they are not with the Lord's people.

Years ago when I first began to notice this phrase in Scripture, I came across a most wonderful verse in the last book of the OT: Mal. 3:16.

Listen to what it tells us:

16 Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.

In the NT we read that after the Apostle Paul was saved,

31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied (Acts 9:31).

Paul, when he was Saul of Tarsus, made it so difficult for the believers, that he was a hindrance to them in their fellowship with each other. But when the Lord saved Saul, that threat, at least for the time being, was removed. Fellowship among believers who fear the Lord, is something that you do not miss once you have experienced what it is.

But now let us look at this stanza after noticing that this is really the key to what the psalmist had to say.

Notice in the first verse of the stanza, verse 73 the psalmist was talking to the Lord about what the Lord had done for him. In verse 74 he was talking about his relationship with the people of God, with those who feared the Lord. In verse 75 his own relationship with the Lord. So verse 73 has to do with the Lord. Verse 74 has to do with the people of God. Verse 75 the focus is upon the psalmist's attitude toward the Lord.

Then beginning with verse 76 and going down to the end of the stanza in verse 80, every verse is a prayer beginning with the word, "Let."

So the first three verses seem to be set apart from the last five.

The first verse can be looked upon in two ways. The psalmist may be addressing the Lord as his Creator, or (and I believe this is the proper interpretation) he was addressing the Lord as His Savior. And I say that because after saying that the Lord had made him and fashioned him, he went on to speak of his life as a child of God. And that thought carries over into the next verse, as well as into the rest of the stanza. Actually God does a creative work when He saved us, doesn't He? We are new creatures in Christ. And the psalmist wanted to be able to understand what it was that the Lord wanted him to do, or, to put it another way, now the Lord wanted him to live. This is basic to a life of fearing God. We want to please Him, but we can't please Him unless we are living in obedience to His commandments.

Now look at verse 74. Those who fear the Lord, those who love Him and want to please Him, "will be glad when they see me." Why? Because I have hoped in thy Word. That is what you are doing when you seek to do the will of God. Everybody makes plenty of mistakes before we come to the Lord, but afterwards we see that the safest and happiest way to live is by obeying God's Word because they we are placing our trust, our hope, that this is the way to please God. So when people who fear the Lord are approached by another believer who manifests by the way he lives that he wants to please the Lord, then the saints are glad to see Him coming. It is important that we all believe the truth, but people can believe the truth without walking in the truth, and it is in our lives that we show that we fear the Lord.

In verse 73 the psalmist is giving his approval to the way the Lord has led him *by the Word*, and he has even found that in the trials and testings of his life, God has been manifesting His faithfulness toward him, the

psalmist.

So we really have in brief a glimpse into the life of one whose heart is motivated by the fear of the Lord. The world has nothing that can even begin to compare with a life of fearing God.

But the first three verses have to do with progress that has been made in the psalmist's life up to that point. But the next five petitions, because that is what they are, show how the psalmist was depending upon the Lord to continue to meet his needs. The word "let" indicates that the Lord could make all of these provisions, but that it was up to Him to give what the psalmist knew that he needed.

The first petition in verse 76. The psalmist knew, as we all should know, that one of the most constant needs we have is for comfort, or encouragement. There is always something to pull us down. Discouragements are everywhere. But where did the psalmist look for his encouragement? He looked to the Lord. But how do you and I look to the Lord? The same way the psalmist did: "according to Thy Word unto Thy servant." You see, not all of the Word was given to us, but it all was given for us! And that is the way we need to look at the Word. It is God's Word, and especially in His promises, that we find comfort and encouragement for our souls.

The second petition is in verse 77. He was asking the Lord for a daily gift of His tender mercies so that he could live, not just stay alive (although that was included), but that he might live to please the Lord. You see, the psalmist knew, and we should know that we can't live to please the Lord if we are "on our own." We need those "tender mercies" from the Lord by which He strengthens us to do His will. This is what leads us from the desire that is in our hearts, to the fulfillment of the desire in daily living. How many times we have sought to do the will of God, and failed, because we have been seeking to do it in our own strength, rather than in the strength of the Lord.

The third petition is in verse 78. We have seen before that we live in a hostile world, a world that is not a friend of grace, the grace of God. The proud are those who look upon the people of God as weaklings who have to depend upon the Lord. To deal perversely means that they were those people who do everything they possibly can to make it difficult for a child of God. Notice that the psalmist was not "taking them on" himself, but he

was calling upon the Lord to be his Defender. Notice, too, that the proud did not have any reason to make trouble for the psalmist. He was not suffering for wrongdoing that he was guilty of; he was suffering because he was a child of God. In the meantime he would meditate on the precepts of the Lord, those passages where the Lord has promised to care for His people, or the Shepherd for His sheep.

The fourth petition is in verse 79. And here he comes back to the people of God. In verse 74 the psalmist was coming to them; here in verse 79 he wanted them to come to him. And he wants them to come to him with the testimonies of the Lord. This reminds me of a verse in Isa. 50, the fourth verse:

4 The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned (Isa. 50:4).

Let's think of the saints he wanted to come to him. We never know who we are going to meet on a given day, a saint in spiritual need, perhaps one who has not really been walking with the Lord. And the Lord has given us "a word in season" because he is going to cross our path with someone else that day, or even the next, who needs just that Word. This is one big reason why we should get awake early in the morning in time to get that "word in season" which we can enjoy, and then give to someone else. The psalmist always brings us back to the Word, doesn't he?

The fifth and last petition is in verse 80. Do you know what a sound heart is? By definition it is a heart without blemish, an undefiled heart, a heart in which there is no known sin. And how do we know when it is "sound"? It stands approved before the Word of God, and in particular before the statutes of the Word. When you think of the Word of God as statutes, think of how God gave the commandments to Moses; they were engraved in stone! They were not to be changed. They cannot be changed. That is the only way for us to keep ourselves unashamed, although it is actually God through His Word Who keeps us living by the Word of God.

The psalmist had every reason to believe that the proud in verse 78 would be ashamed because they had no place for God or His Word. One really sad thing we see constantly today is that people can sin, and they know they do, but they are not ashamed of what they have done. On the other hand, a child of God can be quickly ashamed of evil thoughts, or a

careless word, or a sinful act of any kind. The psalmist was praying that his heart would be without blemish, that which was required of every animal that was offered in sacrifice to the Lord.

**Concl:** Let me recommend that you and I pray these five petitions often. These requests are what God will give to those who truly want to live in the fear of the Lord. And let us, as we seek to live to please the Lord, keep in close contact with those other people we know who want to live the same way. All of it means that, as with the writer of Psalm 119, we not only need to pray, but we need to live close to the Lord and to live by His Word. May God in His grace enable us each day to love and to fear Him.