

No Fear

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Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

- [0 : 0 0] Music To the service this evening, those who are watching online and listening on the telephone, if you have with us gathering together to worship God.
- And we're going to begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise, Psalm 118. And we sing the first six verses of the psalm. Oh, praise the Lord, for he is good, his mercy lasteth ever.
- Let those of Israel now say, his mercy faileth never. Sing down to the end of verse 6. Oh, praise the Lord, for he is good, his mercy lasteth ever.
- Let those of Israel now say, his mercy faileth never.
- Now let the house of Aaron say, his mercy lasteth ever. Let those that fear the Lord now say, his mercy faileth never.
- [1 : 2 1] I in distress called on the Lord, the Lord did answer me. He in a large place did me set, from trouble made me free.
- The mighty Lord is on my side, I will not be afraid. For anything that man can do, I shall not be dismayed.
- In our hearts, Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of prayer. We thank you that we are able to come to you, speak to you, and you give us the assurance that you hear us and that you will answer us.
- And we thank you that you also are the God who speaks to us. You give us your word, and we thank you for the psalm that we have sung, the psalm that we will shortly turn to read and to study. And we praise you, Lord, that as we meditate upon these words, we see more clearly who you are, and we are drawn in worship to bow before you.
- You're the God who is merciful, and that's one of the things that is emphasised in these opening verses. You're the God who withholds from us the wrath that we are due because of our sin, and gives to us the gift of eternal life in Christ.
- [2 : 4 5] And we thank you for all that we have thought upon, even in this day, the fact of Christ's death in our place, paying the punishment for our sin, and the joy of Christ's resurrection, his rising from the dead, to make clear to us that the price of salvation has been paid, and the offer of eternal life is now there for us.
- So help us, we pray, to take hold of that eternal life that is offered to us in Jesus. Open our ears to hear the call of Christ to come to him. Open our eyes to see the beauty and the glory of Christ, and our desperate need to come to Jesus as our Saviour, and to bow before him, and to glorify him through our lives as our Lord.
- We ask, Lord, for your help as we study this passage tonight. We need the help of the Holy Spirit, and we need to be led and guided by him.
- And we thank you that we have that promise, that when we gather together as we do so, that you are with us. We pray that we would know the teaching, the presence, the help of the Holy Spirit, and all that we would seek to do.

And Lord, we pray not just for ourselves, as we would seek to gather and worship. We pray for many who are not able to gather and worship, perhaps some who are unable to connect through these new ways of being able to join together, and those who may feel isolated in their home.

[4 : 07] And we ask that you would draw near to them, and that they would know your presence with them, and your peace in them. And we pray also for those who would readily be able to connect, and yet have no desire.

And we bring them to you, Lord. We do not look down upon them, because we know that you are the God who comes to us before we would ever come to you. So we ask that you would awaken the souls of those who are still far from Jesus, and who have no sense of need and no desire to come.

And as we think about them in our own minds, we ask that you would move within their hearts, and that you would draw them to Christ. We pray for people who are far from us in different countries.

We think of places like China, where there is no freedom to meet physically, and neither is no freedom to meet digitally either, as the government clamps down in any gatherings to worship Jesus.

And we pray for your people, that you would protect them, Lord, and that you would help them, that you would enable them to know your presence, and to worship you. We thank you that we see in Scripture, and we see through history, that the more the authorities try to close down the gospel, the more the gospel will spread.

[5 : 18] We thank you for the promise of Christ, that he will build his church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. So, Lord, be at work, we pray, across all the nations. Be at work in our nation, we pray.

We thank you for the encouragements we have seen even in past days, where the message of the gospel is on the front page of newspapers. We hear it on the television. We hear it coming through the radio way.

We ask, Lord, that the message of the gospel of Christ would travel at great speed through this country at this time, and that we who once were known for our love of the book would return to the book from which we have so far strayed.

That we who once were known for our love of the Saviour would return to the Saviour, who promises that he will return to us and we return to him. So, hear our prayers for our nation.

Hear our prayers for those who are in hospital just now, for those who are in the care homes in Leivarborough and Tarbert here. We think of Stornoway as well, and Larbuya in particular, where one of our own congregation has gone in recent days.

[6 : 22] And we ask for your blessing upon all those who are in these homes and your protection over them. We pray for those who are locked in their own homes and who are struggling, where family tensions may be high.

We pray for those who are struggling with addictions and who find it very hard not to yield to these temptations at this time. And as we bring them to you, we ask, Lord, that you would give them strength that is not from within themselves, but from heaven itself.

So, hear our prayers for all those who are struggling. We are poor, we are needy, but we thank you that we have a God who hears and who answers our prayers. So, lead us and guide us by your Spirit, we pray.

Go before us, we ask in Jesus' name. We will read now that psalm that we sang, Psalm 118. We'll read the whole of this psalm. It's God's word. If thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever.

Let Israel say, his love endures forever. Let the house of Aaron say, his love endures forever. Let those who fear the Lord say, his love endures forever. In my anguish I cried to the Lord, and he answered by setting me free.

[7 : 27] The Lord is with me, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The Lord is with me, he is my helper. I will look in triumph for my enemies. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.

It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes. All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the Lord I cut them off. They surrounded me on every side, but in the name of the Lord I cut them off.

They swarmed around me like bees, but they died out as quickly as burning thorns. In the name of the Lord I cut them off. I was pushed back and about to fall, but the Lord helped me.

The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous. The Lord's right hand has done mighty things. The Lord's right hand is lifted high.

The Lord's right hand has done mighty things. I will not die, but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done. The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. Open for me the gates of righteousness.

[8 : 22] I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous may enter. I will give you thanks, for you answered me. You have become my salvation. The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.

The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eye. This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. O Lord, save us. O Lord, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

From the house of the Lord we bless you. The Lord is God, and he has made his life sign upon us. With bows in hand, join the festival procession up to the horns of the altar.

You are my God, and I will give you thanks. You are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us.

I want to begin this evening with a question as we approach this psalm. And the question is, how do you deal with your fears? We all have fears. And we know that fear is a crippling thing.

[9 : 23] Fear spoils everything. Fear spoils our sleep. It spoils our enjoyment of today. It spoils our anticipation of tomorrow as well.

So how do we deal with our fears? Well, we know from frustration and from experience that we don't stop being afraid simply because somebody tells us to stop being afraid.

To stop being afraid, we need to understand why we don't need to be afraid. And what I'd like to do this evening, as we look at Psalm 118, is consider three of the things that we're most afraid of and look at why we need not fear them if we're trusting in Jesus.

But before we do that, let's just pause for a moment and think about the context of Psalm 118 and what was going on when it was first written.

Well, who wrote the psalm? We're not sure exactly who wrote the psalm. The likelihood is that it was written by a king of Israel. One of the commentators, Dr. Stephen Lawson, suggests that it was written by a king of Israel.

[10 : 26] And it was written by a king of Israel who, and I'm quoting here, found himself in the midst of a national crisis. When the nations of the world were surrounding Israel and infringing on their national security and their future was at stake, this king, on behalf of the nation, called upon God and petitioned God, and God answered, and God heard, and God delivered the king, and he delivered his people out of this hour of crisis.

So that was the context of the psalm when it was first written. And I thought that was an interesting thing to share because we find ourselves at this point as a nation in the midst of crisis, a national crisis.

We're not under attack from foreign armies. We're under attack from an enemy that's so small we can't even see it. This virus which has turned our world upside down has left us hugely insecure.

It's left many people incredibly fearful, and many people would say what was being said at the time the psalm was written, our future is at stake.

So what are we to do in this time of national crisis? Well, if we take a guide from Psalm 118, we're to call out to God. We're to look to God because it's only when we look to God that we are able to live a life that isn't crippled by fear, but is steadied by faith.

[11 : 48] And as the psalmist looks to God in this psalm, he's able to say three things. First of all, that he has no fear of man. And secondly, he has no fear of death. And thirdly, he has no fear of failure.

So that's what we'll look at this evening. If we're in Christ, if we're trusting in God, if we're looking to God, we can say that we have no fear of man, we have no fear of death, we have no fear of failure.

So first of all, no fear of man. Look at verses one to verse nine. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love endures forever. Let Israel say his love endures forever. Let the house of Aaron say his love endures forever.

Let those who fear the Lord say his love endures forever. In my anguish, I cried out to the Lord and he answered, by setting me free, the Lord is with me. I will not be afraid.

What can man do to me? The Lord is with me. He is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.

[12 : 47] I remember when we lived in Skye for a period, there was an old missionary who lived not far from us. And he used to present in the church that we were in.

And he used to take his part and give a lead in the male voice choir. And I've always remembered, before he would sing, he would go into his pocket and he would take out this little metal thing, which I learned afterwards was a tuning fork.

And he'd ping it, he'd put it to his ear and take a note on his lips. And that would give him the note to begin the psalm on. And this psalm, in terms of its opening note, it begins on a note of thanksgiving, as so many of the psalms actually do.

And that may surprise us when we think first about this. And when we consider the danger the nation of Israel were in, it may surprise us to think that this king, who was under so much pressure, would begin on that note of thankfulness.

But it shouldn't actually surprise us, because when we consider the logic of this, it's powerful. If this king was to focus on the men and the nations and the enemies who were against him, he would likely, in that hour of national crisis, have buckled under the pressure.

[13 : 58] If the king was to focus and be transfixed on all the problems that were pressing in on him, he would likely give in to fear. But as he focuses on God, as he focuses on the enduring love of God that we see in verses 1 and 2 and 3 and 4, as he calls out to the God whom he recognizes is powerful and mighty, and who hears him, verse 5, and who is able to give him help and triumph, it's as if his enemies and his problems before our very eyes seem to shrink.

And he's able to say, in verse 6, the Lord is with me. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? And so we see here that his fear fades as he focuses on God.

And so he calls the whole nation, look at verses 2 and 3. In fact, he calls not just his nation, but he calls everyone who fears the Lord to focus on God and to join him in praise of God and thanksgiving for who God is.

He calls everyone to put their trust, not in the king, not in man, verse 8, not in princes, verse 9, but in the Lord. Now we spend so much of our lives in this day looking through the lens of a camera, and we know that that doesn't always give us the right perspective.

If you put anything too close to the lens, it looks huge, and it may actually dwarf things that are many times its actual size, and that's true of the things that we fear. If we let them fill the lens of our life, then they're blown out of all proportion, and they seem to grow the closer we are to them, and God shrinks.

[15 : 43] But when we look to God, as the psalmist did, when we see him as he is, in his greatness and in his power, and yet in his grace and his willingness to reach down and help us, then our problems shrink.

Our fear of man and the problems that man brings into our life fades. So when we're trusting in God, the first thing that we can say with a psalmist is we have no fear of man.

But I know that some of us will likely be saying, and some of us who are Christians will likely be saying, but I do fear man at times. And the reality is, we do.

It may not be physical attack that we fear, but we do fear what people think of us at times. We fear what people may be saying about us. We fear sometimes the chatter of social media and the attacks that come from there.

Now, if we feel that fear, does that mean that we're not Christians? Well, no, it doesn't. But it does mean that we may have taken our eyes off Jesus. Remember in the storm of Matthew 14, you can maybe turn there for a moment if you want and scan through the verses.

[16 : 48] But in that storm, it suddenly comes upon the disciples when they're in the boat. All of a sudden they see Jesus and Jesus calls Peter to come out to him.

And it says in verse 30 of Matthew 14, Then Peter got down, out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus. So far, so good. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, cried out, Lord, save me!

And immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. You have little faith, he said. Why did you doubt? And I think there we are taught an important lesson. When Peter's eyes are on Jesus, when Jesus is filling his vision, he's walking steady, miraculously steady.

But when he saw the wind, and when he saw the waves that were crashing around him, he felt fear, and he began to sink. And that's our experience too.

So to live a life of fear, a life of no fear of man, we are required day by day by day to look to God and to fix our eyes upon Jesus.

[17 : 53] And when we're living that way, we can say with the psalmist, we have no fear of man. So first of all, we see that when we're trusting in the Lord, we should have no fear of man.

The second thing to note here is that when we're trusting in the Lord, we have no fear of death. Look at verses 10 down to verse 18. We're given this picture of the psalmist as he is facing the very real possibility of death.

Verse 10, Shouts of joy and victory Resigned in the tents of the righteous.

The Lord's right hand has done mighty things. The Lord's right hand is lifted high. The Lord's right hand has done mighty things. I will not die, but live and will proclaim what the Lord has done.

The Lord has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death. On many occasions in the Psalms, there was deliverance for the psalmist from death.

[19 : 07] We saw that last week even in Psalm 116. And in Psalm 118, we have another such example. The psalmist is in a completely impossible situation. He is absolutely surrounded, it says in verses 10 and 11.

Enemies are swarming around him like bees. Verse 12. I remember being in that situation. My two pals, Ronnie and Morris, Castle Brown Stornhill, and we were swarmed just suddenly by bees and wasps.

And we screamed and we waved our arms and we ran as fast as we could, but there was no escape. They were absolutely stuck on us. I still have nightmares every time a blue bottle comes anywhere near me.

But that was a picture of where the king was. That's a picture of where the nation of Israel were. But they did escape. Even though they're surrounded, they're swarmed by enemies, they did escape.

So how did they escape? Well, the psalmist is wanting us to be absolutely clear that it was through God's help. By the name of the Lord, verses 10, 11, 12. It's repeatedly, the psalmist says, it's through the name of the Lord that we escape.

[20 : 13] The Lord helped in verse 13. It was through God's strength and salvation, verse 14. It was by the Lord's right hand, verses 15 and 16. It was through what the Lord has done, verse 7.

So it's absolutely clear that the psalmist is saying our being saved from death was not from our expertise or our strength. It was God's doing, not ours.

But will that always happen? I mean, this is a happy story of the psalmist and the nation being saved from death. But will that always happen? Will we always be saved from death? We know the answer to that question is no.

Open Doors, one of the charities that give news on the persecuted church, they report that 11 Christians on average are killed every day simply because of their faith in Jesus.

And that's the way it's been since the church of Christ began. We can think of Stephen in Acts chapter 7. He wasn't saved from death, but he was saved in death. As he was being stoned, God was with him and was filling him.

[21 : 14] You can read the account at your own convenience later on. But in Acts chapter 7 and at verse 55, let me just give you a couple of verses. We have this picture as Stephen is approaching death.

And Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Look, he said, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

And Jesus there was welcoming Stephen into that everlasting life that was promised to him. But the reality is for us, for all of us, there will come a day to die.

We're not here forever. But should we fear that? Well, no, we shouldn't. Why not? Well, because if we're trusting in the Lord Jesus, if he is our saviour, he has promised that he will, that he will save us from the cold grip of death.

We are not given over to death, verse 18, because Jesus himself gave himself over to death. We read in Romans 6, 23, that the wages of sin is death, but Jesus paid that price for our sin on the cross.

[22 : 23] He was not a sinner, but we are sinners and he stood in our place, paid the wages of death. He died for us, but that was not the end. That's what we remember every Lord's Day.

It's what we remember in a special way on Easter Sunday. Death was not the end. Death could not hold Jesus. He rose from the dead. And if we're trusting in him, the gospel promise is that death cannot hold us either.

As we sang this morning in the hymn, in Christ alone, no guilt in life, no fear in death. This is the power of Christ in me.

So the question for us, the most important question for us to answer within our own hearts is Christ in you. It's all very well to know gospel truths out there.

It's one thing to see Jesus at a distance, to hear his promises, but if we're to have this hope, then Christ needs to be in us. These promises, gospel promises, need to be things that we have taken hold of by faith.

[23 : 24] Christ is in you. If you and I are believing in him, then we need not fear death. If God is with us, if he is in us, if he is for us, then who can be against us?

Well, not man, says the psalmist. We don't have to fear man. And not death, says the psalmist. We don't have to fear death. That was Paul's observation as well in Romans chapter 8. He asks that question, if God is for us, who can be against us?

And then he quotes from Psalm 44, a psalm which teaches us that God's people can always expect to endure life-threatening trouble. And he says, quoting from Psalm 44, For your sake, we face death all day long.

We are considered a sheep to be slaughtered. And then he answers by saying, no, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now that's not just a nice little poem that we take out at a few notes. That is a series of verses that are packed full of promises for us to take hold of.

[24 : 43] These verses are designed, if we are trusting in Christ, to deal with our fears and to boost our faith and to give us joy and to give us thankful hearts.

And the Apostle Paul, it's because he had this assurance that he's able to say in Philippians chapter 1, for me to live as Christ and to die as gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me.

Yet what shall I choose? I do not know. I am torn between the two. I desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

That's what he says to the church in Philippi. But what's clear in these verses is that the Apostle Paul is a man who has no fear of death because he has faith in Christ.

For us, if we are without Christ, if we have no faith in Christ, we have every reason to fear death. If God is not for us but is against us, we have every reason to fear judgment.

[25 : 43] But if we are in Christ, we have nothing to fear, not even death. We can think of Psalm 23. It talks about going through death's dark veil, fearing no evil. Why?

Because the Lord Jesus is with us. So if we are trusting in him, we should have no fear of man. We should have no fear of death. And finally, and briefly, we should have no fear of failure.

And that takes us from verse 19 down to verse 29, down to the end of the psalm. I'm conscious of the time, so I'm just going to focus on verse 25 and note here that in verse 25, the psalmist prays that God would grant success.

And we know from the context of the psalm that God does grant success. This is a prayer that's answered for the psalmist in the context that he was in. But what does it mean for us?

Can we expect that God will always grant us success in whatever shape or form of success we're looking for? I mean, does this mean, does this mean that we'll always be given success and always be given prosperity in this world?

[26 : 48] Does this mean that we'll never fail an exam if God is with us? Does this mean that we'll never lose money? We'll never go bankrupt? We'll never be made redundant? We'll never end up getting hurt through broken relationships?

Is this the kind of success that the psalmist is talking about? Well, no, it's not. We do fail. We know that. In lots of ways, we fail in this broken world.

The promise of success that the psalmist takes hold of here is a promise for us that has traction on the eternal track. When we think in the ultimate sense, ultimate, we cannot fail, we cannot be lost if we are trusting in Jesus.

And again, as is so often the case in these psalms, we see Jesus come into focus in these verses. He is the gate that is referred to in verse 19.

Open for me the gates of righteousness. Who can open for us the gates of righteousness? Who is it that bids us to come in with these thankful hearts that the psalmist has?

[27 : 49] Well, it's Jesus. Jesus is the one who said, I am the gate. He said that in John chapter 10. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. Jesus is the one that we see in verse 22.

We read there about the cornerstone or the capstone. Jesus is the one, the stone that the builders rejected that has become the capstone or the cornerstone. Think again about the words of the hymn that we sang this morning.

In Christ alone my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song, this cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm.

It's Christ that we see in verse 22. It's the Lord Jesus that we see in verses 23 to 25. Who is the Lord who has done this work of salvation for us?

It's Christ. Where did he do it? He did it on the cross. Jesus is the one that we see in verse 26. He's the one who came in the name of the Lord. Remember on Palm Sunday as Jesus came into Jerusalem.

[28 : 49] These are the exact words that the crowds shouted out to praise him as he was en route to the cross. And it was on the cross that Jesus who is the light of the world verse 27.

And it was on the cross that Jesus who is the light in that sense shined his light upon us so that we would be enabled in him to overcome the darkness of sin and death and Satan and hell.

Jesus is the one we see here and all that he has done he has done for us. And if we are trusting in him we cannot fail in that eternal sense because Jesus did not fail.

We cannot live a perfect sinless life. We know that. But Jesus did. He did it for us. We can't meet the standard of God's perfection but Jesus met it for us.

And in terms of the qualifications of salvation we cannot make ourselves good enough to be saved. We cannot cut a deal with God that will unlock the door for our salvation but to quote Psalm 22 at the end of the psalm he has done it.

[29 : 54] It's finished and if we are trusting in him all this he has done for us in our place. So as the hymn goes when Satan tempts me to despair and he tells us we fail and Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within upward I look and see him Jesus there who made an end of all my sin because the sinless saviour died my sinful soul is counted free for God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me behold him there Jesus the risen lamb my perfect spotless righteousness the great unchangeable I am the king of glory and of grace one with himself I cannot die my soul is purchased by his blood my life is hid with Christ on high with Christ my saviour and my God if we are in Christ we have no fear of failure we have no fear of death we have no fear of man so how can you and I deal with our fear we deal with our fears by looking faith to Christ so looking faith to Christ trusting and praising

Lord God we pray that you would indeed enable us to look faith to Jesus we confess we often fixate on things that cause our hearts to be full of fear and yet we think that when we look as Peter did to Jesus we are able to walk steady and we are able to say with a psalmist that we have no fear of man we have no fear of death we have no fear of failure not because of who we are but because of who Christ is and because of all he has done for us help us to take hold of it by faith and we pray this in Jesus name Jesus the throne of God of have a strong a perfect plea a great high priest whose name is whoever lives and home my name is graven on his hand my name is written on his heart

I know that while in heaven he's hung and hung and bid me of the guilt within up up up upward upward I look and see because the sinless savior died my sinful soul is counted free for God the just is satisfied look on him and look on him and there love perfect spotless righteousness the great unchangeable I am king of glory and of grace one with himself I cannot die my soul is purchased with his blood my life is hid twice twice twice say my all now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forevermore