

Here We Stand: *Coram Deo*
"Before the Face of God"
Psalm 27

Intro:

We are still in our Reformation series. We are now considering three important emphases that came out of the reformation: *coram deo*, *misseo dei*, *priesthood of the believer*. This morning we are going cover *coram deo* which means *before the face of God*

- *Coram deo* was an important concept for Martin Luther because it was Luther's desire to know that God loved and accepted him that drove him into the word of God. What Luther discovered in the word of God was, yes God punished sinners but that He made a way for them to be saved! He discovered that God did in fact loved sinners so much that God, Himself, took on human flesh and paid for the sins, the very sins of the creatures He created. Luther discovered in the word of God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone that sinners can be saved and live their lives in the presence of God. Their faith in Christ united them with Christ and, here is another Latin phrase that was important to Luther, *Christus pro me*, Christ is for me.
- The problem sinners have had since the Garden of Eden is that people have both desired and dreaded the glory of the face of God on them. What happened in the Garden was that God created everything perfectly for His people. They were created for God's own glory and to enjoy the very, personal, intimate presence of God. However, after Adam's sin that fellowship was broken. Man was now a sinner and could not bear the full presence and fellowship of God that he so much longed for and was created to enjoy. Adam both desired and dreaded the presence of God after his sin and we have all inherited that desire and dread.
- However, let's trace some of this through the Old Testament.

In **Exodus 33:18**, all Moses wants is to see the glory of God in the face of God but Yahweh tells him that he cannot see his face for no man can see his face and live. The beauty of the LORD is both something to be desired and deadly.

When we read **Leviticus** we hear Yahweh teach His people that when they would break His laws that He would set His face against them. It was not good thing to have Yahweh set His face against you.

Yet it is good for Yahweh to make His face shine on His people. **Numbers 6:22-26** says, "*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.'*" In this passage, we hear this desire for the face of the Yahweh to shine, smile and be gracious to His people. What we find in the Old Testament is that

Yahweh would make His face to shine on them in a way that was not deadly but poured out his grace on them. It was not a full revelation of His presence but it was enough of one that they knew there was more and they wanted more of God.

When we get to the Psalms we are taught in Scripture to seek the thing that would kill us—the face of God.

- **Psalm 27:8-9** says, *"You have said, 'Seek my face.' My heart says to you, 'Your face, Lord, do I seek.' Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!"*
- In **Psalm 51:9**, King David dreaded the gaze of God upon his sin when he wrote, *"Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities."* David sounds like Adam and Eve hiding in the Garden from God.

What we find in Scripture is this tension between what we desire—the face of God, the presence of God and the glory of God in our lives and yet there is this dread of the face of God upon us because we know we are sinners. This was Adam's struggle, Moses' struggle, King David's struggle and it was Martin Luther's struggle and it is our struggle.

Now having said that, turn to **Psalm 27**. We are going to work through **Psalm 27** and let it walk us through the idea of what it means to live life *coram deo*; *before the loving gaze and presence of God*.

There are two main themes at work in Psalm 27. One theme is David's confidence in God in a fearful situation because his enemies are seeking to destroy him. The other theme is David's desire to seek the face of God. When we examine **Psalm 27** we find David swinging between two emotions: confidence and anxiety and trusting and yet fearful. Although his emotions are swinging back and forth, what we find is by the end of the Psalm his confidence in Yahweh has won out.

As far as the background of the Psalm goes, we do not really know what it is. We don't know whether David is writing expressing confidence in God as he is faces his enemies or if it is a Psalm of lament, crying out for help, against the dark background of facing foes who seek to destroy him. Both moods are woven through this Psalm.

Regardless of the situation, we understand David's emotions. Have your circumstances in life every dealt you such a blow that you find yourself swinging back and forth between confidence in God and consumed with anxiety, trusting God and also fearful that you will be hung out to dry or between hope in God or hopelessness? I do. Welcome to my world. This is part of what it means to be a weak human being.

I mean I long to be confident that the face of God and His presence is going with me but someone can look at me wrong and my heart can go racing. My mind will begin to fret and be anxious, *"What's wrong? Why did they look at me funny? Are they angry with me? He spoke to me in a snarky way or he didn't speak to me at all. What's the problem? What did I do wrong?"* On and on my evaluation of one single encounter of an interaction of a person can go until my heart is in the ditch. You might as well throw some dirt on me while I am there and bury me.

Then I go back to what I know to be true and preach the gospel to my heart. *"Heart why are you downcast? Don't you know that Christ is for you? Have you forgotten that the presence and smile of God is of most importance? Jesus is not dead, He is alive so live like it, live like He loves you despite of your sin. Heart get out of the ditch!"*

Back and forth I go between confidence and anxiety. It should be comforting that King David, the greatest king in Israel's history, struggled with the same thing. David's struggle gives us insight into what it means to live *coram deo in all of life*.

Here is the main point of the sermon this morning: **Living life coram deo means believing Jesus is for you.**

I. Living Coram Deo means being confident in God (vv. 1-3)

II. Living Coram Deo means desiring God (vv. 4-6)

III. Living Coram Deo means seeking God (vv. 7-12)

IV. Living Coram Deo means believing God is for you (vv. 13-14)

I. Living *Coram Deo* means being confident in God (vv. 1-3)

- **In these first three verses David confesses his confidence in Yahweh.** Honestly David's confession sounds like a journal entry where he is pouring out his heart and reminding himself of why he should be confident. He confesses his confidence in God no matter how dark the circumstances but at the same time He is having to remind himself why to be confident.
- **Notice what he says, he says Yahweh is his light and salvation and his stronghold.** Light is a powerful image in the Bible. Light in the Scriptures represents everything good, truth, knowledge, moral purity, the revelation of God and even redemption. That God is Light reminds of God's glory. When any of us think of God, perhaps trying to visualize him, the best we can do is to think of light, remembering Paul's teaching that God *"lives in unapproachable light"* (1 Timothy 6:16). Likewise we see in Psalm 104 that God *"wraps himself in light as with a garment"* (v. 2). Psalm 36:9 declares, *"In your light we see light."*

However, **Psalm 27:1** is the only Old Testament text in which God is actually called *light*. It is not until we get to the New Testament that we find the fullest revelation of God as Light and that is in Jesus Christ. In the first chapter of John's gospel we learn that Jesus is the true light that has come into the world.

- **However, what about Psalm 27?** What we find is King David facing implacable adversaries that wanted to destroy him and like a pack of ravenous wolves they wanted to tear him limb to limb, but David confessed in the darkness of the confusion and chaos that Yahweh was his Light, his salvation, his stronghold, his hope and his help. David knew that darkness of the battlefield would become the darkness of his heart and mind if he did not have confidence in God as his light.

Application: Living *Coram Deo* means being confident that the Lord is your light to guide you, He is your salvation to deliver you and that He is the stronghold in whom you take refuge.

- **Can you make the confession David did in vv. 1-3?** Can you say that with David this morning? If you cannot say that I am glad you are here for the Light of God is shining on you. Jesus Christ is the fullest and complete revelation of the Light of God for all men. He is illuminating your heart right now and showing you right now that you need to come to Him and let him be your light and your salvation. You need to turn from rejecting God by ignoring Him and living life your own way, on your own terms, and turn to Jesus by trusting Him as your Savior.
- **Brother and sister in Christ when I hear vv. 1-3 I hear a man preaching the truths of God to himself while he is going through a dark time in his life.** King David was Israel's greatest ruler and there were times that even he vacillated between confidence in God and anxiety. David was keenly aware of God's presence in his life and God sovereignly working in his life. You probably have never been singled out by a prophet and before your whole family had your head anointed with oil and declared to be the next leader of the nation. You and I do not have David's resume as a person and yet David had days where he rocked back and forth between confidence in God and fears that he would fail.

Why did he do this? It was because he was a weak, sinful human. So . . . to some degree . . . I want to normalize our anxieties and inconsistencies. Yet I do not want to leave us there. We must grow in grace. We must grow in our faith and like David we must confess our confidence in God in the darkness of anxiety. What are we to do?

We trust in Christ, the One who endured the darkness for us. We make our confident stand in Him. We do what David did and preach the goodness of the gospel to ourselves in the darkness. Jesus took the darkness of our sin on the cross in our place and for this sin. Therefore the worst that can happen has already fallen on Jesus. It is in this understanding that you and I can confidently say--Jesus is for me!!

TRANSITION: But it is not like the old country song that says: *me and Jesus, we got our own thing going*. Look in vv. 4-6

II. Living Coram Deo means desiring God (vv. 4-6)

- **In v. 4 we hear David's great passion—to behold the beautiful presence of Yahweh.** He longed to gaze and stare wonderfully at the beauty of the LORD as one beholds the beauty of a sunrise or a sunset or a painting. This is an interesting desire at this point because he had just been preaching to his heart to be confident in the Lord in the middle of trials and now he longs to behold God's beauty.
- **Here is what David knows;** David knows that beholding the beauty of the Lord lifts him out of the darkness of the suffering he is in.
- **But I want you to pay attention to where David is beholding the beauty of the Lord.** He went to the *house of the Lord, the temple, his tent [tabernacle] and his shelter*. Now the temple was not built yet so David's heart is elevated all the way up to God's heavenly temple. Nevertheless all of these images point us to David's desire to be in the presence of the Lord.
- **Beholding the beauty of God transforms us.** We become who God created us to be by beholding His majesty and glory. Beholding is becoming but it is not inactivity.
- **Also do not miss David's effort he put forth to seek the face of God.** David *asked the LORD, sought the LORD, desired to gaze on the beauty of the LORD, inquired of the LORD, offered sacrifices and shouts of joy, he sang and made melody to the LORD*.
- **Here is what we need to know about David's activities and I appeal to C. S. Lewis in his work *Reflections on the Psalms*.** Lewis said for the ancients the tangible elements of worship like sacrifices and offerings were very much connected to the intangible experience of beauty and joy in worship.

It was like their spiritual appetite for worship was almost satisfied in the physical activity. You hear the satisfaction of worship and the presence of God in the language of **Psalm 42:2**, "*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?*" To "*appear before God*" means to be in His temple. We hear it in **Psalm 50:2**, "*Out of Zion¹, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.*" His point and my point as well was that for the ancients, in David's day, the tangible and the intangible were not separated but connected. They actually seemed to experience God as they gathered together for worship.²

¹ Zion also represents Jerusalem.

² C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 50-51.

The effect was that as they gathered together with the God's people they beheld the glory of God and it somehow lifted them up above their struggles and difficulties. David says beholding the beauty of the Lord lifted his head up above his enemies, his struggles, his trials, his tribulation.

Application:

- **Listen to me and stay with me here.** I don't want to lose you. Our salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone period. Salvation is a sole work of the Holy Spirit to bring a dead spiritual heart to life for the glory of God.

While salvation is by grace alone through faith alone it does not mean after we are saved we do not put forth any effort. Our growth in our faith is our cooperating with Holy Spirit. New birth in Christ brings forth in us new desires and desire is to seek God and to grow in Christ and that means we seek to do good works because we have been saved.

- **Stay with me. Listen we live in a different time than David did.** When Christ came and ushered in the New Covenant He said in **John 4:23**, *"But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him."* He clearly decentralized worship of God from the temple to a spiritual act.

However, I fear that in the evangelical church the pendulum has swung too far in the other direction. I think C. S. Lewis is right and we need to recover something of the weight of glory in worship and the importance of gathering weekly with God's people. The pendulum has swung so far the other way that individual, private, personal worship is more important than corporately worshiping with the body of Christ.

People have wrongly concluded that all they need to do is have private worship by themselves at home apart from a church and so they can worship God at home, on the golf course, in the woods or at the lake. Are these things blessings? Yes. Do they take the place of the importance of church's work of corporate worship? No.

Part of the work of worship that seeks the face of God is to participate actively in what is going on in the service. One of the means of sanctifying, sustaining, preserving grace is gathering together on Sunday mornings to reconnect with the body as a whole after a long week of not seeing everyone and worship Jesus together. We must understand the importance of gathering on Sundays - sitting together, singing hymns together, listening to one another sing, reciting Scripture together and listening as it is read aloud by one another, opening our Bibles together and looking up at the pulpit and listening to the person who is reading Scripture or preaching.

One of the things that has not changed since the Old Testament is our call to listen. One of our main responsibilities as the people of God is listening to the word of God as the gathered people of God. The work of listening in a corporate worship service helps us behold and experience the presence and glory of God in His word, by His Spirit and through His people.

Finally do not underestimate the power of taking the sacraments together. The regular gathering to celebrate the Lord's Supper is very important. We gather and hear the word preached, we hear the elements of the Lord's Supper explained. We pass the plates to one another. We handle the cups that remind us of the blood that Jesus shed on the cross for us. We handle the broken crackers that represent His body that was broken for us. We are reminded of the fulfillment of the covenant and the establishing of the New Covenant that was promised so long ago in Christ's body and blood.

How many times have you not wanted to come to the Sunday morning gathering because you are bearing a heavy load, down in the dumps depressed, anxious about something going on in your life, fearful of how things might turn out and only to show up and realize that the service was not geared around anything you are going through but then by simply being here someone encourages you, someone prays for you, someone reaches out to you, the songs lift your heart, the content of the songs and readings remind you of all that Christ has done to save you and display His love for you and have your life refocused on the glory and majesty of God by turning you toward the face of God. You see it was never that God's face had turned away from you but you had turned your face from God by looking at everything else except the One who can truly make a difference.

- **Here is what David knew and what we need to know.** David knew to behold the beauty of God in worship with God's people and in God's word enabled him to have his head held high even though the enemies were all around him. He did not escape. There were all around him! They were closing in on him, but because he gazed on the beauty of God, his head was held up.

Here is what happens. Beholding the beauty of the Lord in worship enables you not only to cope with the difficulties of life, but to triumph over them. Your head is up. That's what it means. It is not an escape. It is not inactivity. It helps you face them. It's not a way of coping; it's a way of triumphing over them. Whatever this is, gazing on the beauty of God enables you to face the rumble of panic underneath everything, the evil and terror of life, and to live with your head up.³ Don't dread looking in the face of God—desire it, seek it, pursue it. What you find when you seek the face of God is not a frowning face or a

³ Timothy J. Keller, [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

scowl that gives you anxiety but the benevolent, loving face of a smiling God who loves His child. What you find is the face of Jesus.

III. Living Coram Deo means believing God will take care of you (vv. 7-12)

- **When we read vv. 7-8 David has settled in on seeking the face of God but what we find later in this stanza is that he is concerned and anxious that Yahweh might turn away from him.** Perhaps because of some sin or disobedience. The fact is we do not really know. All we hear is David vacillating between anxiety and confidence, between fear and hope. However, when we get to the end of v. 9 we hear his confidence return and he confesses that he believes God will not forsake him.
- **Then we get to v. 10 and it really kind of stabs us in the heart.** David was anxious that he feared his mother and father would abandon him.⁴ Whatever was going on in David realized that he was going to have to seek from Yahweh what his parents should have provided: acceptance, guidance and protection.
- **Let me ask you a question, would you be as satisfied as David was if all you had was the LORD to provide as a parent would provide?**
 - **Verse 10 points us to the love and acceptance that parents provide.** What if all you had was the acceptance of God, would that be enough for you?

The fact is that you will be rejected at some point in your life. Parents reject children, children reject their parents, husbands leave wives and wives abandon their husbands, siblings reject one another. Friends can reject us; even some of our best friends will reject us sometimes even painfully. Employers reject employees or vice versa.

The point is all of us will experience the pain of rejection in some relationship at some point in our lives BUT what we need to be confident in is that God never refuses or rejects us. **I love what Charles Spurgeon said about v. 10,** *"These dear relations will be the last to desert me, but if the milk of human kindness should dry up even from their breasts, there is a Father who ever forgets."*

- **Verse 11 reminds us that we need guidance of the Lord.** David prays in v. 11, *"Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies."*

Like children we need the guidance that the Lord provides in His word, by His Holy Spirit and in His church. So we need to cry out to God like David did, *"Hear O Lord . . . be gracious to me and answer me when I call . . . I seek your face . . . so hide not Your face from me . . . O God of my salvation . . . lead me on straight paths."*

⁴ We have no Scriptural account of David's parents ever forsaking him. This is probably a poetic literary device to communicate how confident he is that God would never forsake him.

We need to understand that seeking God and the guidance of God is a lifelong pursuit and we should be confident that the Lord will not abandon us in our pursuit of Him. As **Philippians 1:6**, "*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*"

- **Finally in v. 12 we hear David cry out to the Lord for protection as a child would to his parents.**

The third thing a child looks for in his parents is protection. David knows without Yahweh's protection he has no hope for if his adversaries had their way with him he would be torn to pieces. Their cursing and slander was like wild animals seeking to devour him.

However, the attacker may not be a person. Suppose your enemy is cancer or some other physical suffering that is attacking your body. Suppose your anxiety is coming for the last diagnosis you received from your doctor or a loved one received.

Application:

- **Do you know what you need in that moment?** You need the beautiful presence of God in the middle of trouble and trial. You need to know that Jesus is for you.
- How can we know that no matter what comes our way the face of God will not turn away from us and He will not forsake us? **Verses 13-14 give us a clue**

IV. Conclusion: Living Coram Deo means believing God is for you (vv. 13-14)

- **Here is what I think David is saying at the end of this Psalm.** After all the vacillating between anxiety and confidence and fear and hope; after the amazing imagery of the Lord is His light and his salvation but his enemies are hot on his trail with their fangs showing and all his wants to do is be with God; after all of this David confesses his final confidence in Yahweh in **vv. 13-14**.
- **Why? Look in v. 13—it was by faith.**
 - Now notice that his faith had given him sight, "*I shall look.*"
 - In the middle of turmoil, struggle, strife and trouble his faith had given him sight but notice the object of his faith→ "*the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!*"
- **This was David's faith but we do not live in the time of David.** On this side of the cross and we have a fuller revelation of the goodness of God and He is the Crucified and Living Son of God.
- **Coram Deo and Christus Pro Me: How can we live our lives before the face of God knowing Jesus is for us?**

- Everything wicked in **Psalm 27**, the evildoers; the adversaries and the foes who seek to devour and eat up our flesh, destroy us and create anxiety and trouble for us are all products of the Fall in the Garden. They are a results and evidences of the curse that was placed on mankind when Adam sinned. Because of the curse everything bad in **Psalm 27** fell on Jesus when he died on the cross for you and everything good in Psalm 27 is true for you because Christ purchased it on the cross.
 - He took the darkness of our sin so we could have and enjoy the light of the glory of God.
 - He left His home in heaven, the very temple of God, so we could enter in the presence of God by His blood.
 - The adversaries of God rose up against Jesus and breathed out and carried out violence against God's only Son so that we look upon the goodness of the Lord. Jesus made level the path of salvation for us.
 - Finally He was forsaken by His Father so you could be adopted into His family. We may go through days of trouble but we will never experience the ultimate day of trouble because Jesus took that Day of Trouble for you so dear brothers and sisters *because of what Christ has done for you be strong, and let your heart take courage and whatever difficulty you are going through—wait for the LORD for He will not abandon you.*
 - Friends the fullest presence of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. The presence of God that was lost in the Garden has been restored in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is in Christ that we live *coram deo*. What this means is that if you belong to Jesus then Jesus is for you.
- Friend if you are here today and you are not a Christian I would love to visit with you at the conclusion . . .
- **Brother and sister in Christ, take heart as you wait on the LORD'S return: Jude 24,** *"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen."*