

# Communion Preparatory Service - Faith And Fear

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 01 December 2018

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Now, will you turn with me, please, to the book of Psalms, Psalm 28, the psalm we read a moment ago, Psalm number 28, looking at some of the main features of this psalm as we can go through it, following it as David's prayer with the Lord.

We could say that the psalm really shows two elements which we ourselves relate to, firstly that of fear. There are certain things that David is afraid of, and we'll see how that is quite legitimate, even in the experience of a believer, though sometimes you'll hear people say that believers really shouldn't be afraid of anything because they have the Lord and therefore they are safe and therefore what harm can happen to them? Well, it's not like that in real life, at least not in my experience. There are things that we are afraid of and bring before the Lord as our fears. And so the psalmist mentions some of these.

So that's the first point that we'll look at his fear. But more fully, along with fear, there is his faith. And his faith is expressed in various ways in relation to God and the relationship that he has with God. And they're active at the same time in his heart. It's not that there's fear sometimes, and then that fear is ejected and faith comes in and there's nothing then of fear left. It's not like that. You find here, and I'm sure in your own experience, that fear, a certain amount of fear of things, exists or co-exists with faith. It doesn't make you an unbeliever just because there are certain things in your life that do, from time to time, make you afraid. And just because you find the element of fear in your heart, we're not talking here about the fear of God, which is, of course, mentioned in Scripture often, that reverence, that awe, that love for him and his majesty. This is actually fear in terms of human emotion, where the psalmist is saying that he has indeed a fear of, well, two things we'll see especially. But along with that, as we say, he has his faith and his faith remains active. And his faith brings out this great confession that you have throughout the psalm of how he relates to God and what God is to him. And nowhere does faith show itself more clearly and more fully when you are able to say, this is what God means to me. And I see him in these terms in my life, in my life's experience. But let's look firstly at his fear.

Now, we're not told the context in which the psalm was written. We're not given any indication at all in the psalm itself. Or as you sometimes find where the psalm is in the title, you'll find a context specified as to when David actually uttered this prayer, when it was in the wilderness or whatever. There's nothing like that, really. But there's obviously some crisis or other in his life. It appears in some ways that it might have been an illness. He speaks certainly in terms of someone that would seek recovery from illness or mercy from the Lord. But we're not sure, so we can't say. What we do see is the fear and the faith that he mentions in relation to whatever circumstances actually were. And the first thing that he mentions in terms of his fear is the fear of God being silent. The fear of God being silent to him.

To you, O Lord, I call, my rock, be not deaf to me, lest if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. Those, in other words, who die and leave this life and enter into death.

[ 3 : 4 6 ] Sometimes the pit means hell itself. But in any case, he's saying here, this is something that he has an element of fear about the fear that God would be silent to him. That he would not hear God's voice anymore. That's part of his living relationship with God. And of course, this kind of conversation throughout the psalm, I hardly need to mention this because you're very familiar with it yourself. But conversation or communication with God is the crux or at the, is a crux in the relationship that a believer has with God. I believe that relationship is really only meaningful in terms of this ongoing communication between God and ourselves and ourselves and God that you express through prayer and through praise. And it's an aspect of being born again. It's an aspect of being an adopted child of God that you have planted within you. That expression of your feelings, that expression of your faith, that expression of your fears, that you can go to God with them and

actually be sure that God is not going to actually turn you back, that he's going to listen to you. But nevertheless, this is his appeal. The way in which he equates silence from God, he's effectively equating that with death or saying it's equivalent to death. If I don't hear the voice of God, then I'll die.

It'll be like death to me. It'll be a bereavement to me. And you can relate to that to some extent, at least in your own experience too, because one of the most precious things to you in your life is that you speak to God and he speaks to you. That God is not silent to you. That you hear his voice as he blesses his word to you. That as you not only listen to the word preached, but read the word for yourself or shared it with others in Bible study or whatever, God actually comes and speaks to your heart. You know that he's addressing you. You know that he's met you, that he said something to you, that his word has become really precious, really meaningful to you, because that's his communication with you. And if you take that out of your life tonight, think of your life from this moment onwards as a life of silence from God. No more speaking from God. Nothing of God heard anymore in your life.

Well, it's the equivalent of death, isn't it? Because it's that relationship with God that you have that really is equivalent to life, where he speaks to you and you speak to him.

And there are various parts in the Bible where this is actually mentioned elsewhere on the part of believers as well. But it's also mentioned in terms of, for example, Amos, one of the prophets in chapter 8 of Amos, he was speaking of the way that God was going to come to judge the people because of their sinfulness, their departure from God, their despicable ways. And one of the things that he said, or God said through Amos was this, behold, he says, the days are coming, declares the Lord, Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. They shall wander from sea to sea and from north to east.

They shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, but they shall not find it. That's pretty terrifying. That God's word would no longer be available to the people.

[ 7 : 28 ] It's an aspect of his judgment as far as Israel and Judah were concerned, as Amos is very much there speaking for God and the name of God. And we can apply that to our own circumstances today, because one of the things we should really fear is that God would no longer speak to us as a people, that God would withdraw his presence, withdraw his word from us. How do you reach the point where he would say, well, I've dealt with these people and given them so much liberty to trust in me, to come back to my word, but they throw it in my face. And the point has come when I'm no longer going to speak to them. That is really a famine and a famine to be afraid of.

And just take an individual in the New Testament, King Herod. King Herod in the time of Jesus, just before Jesus was about to be tried, the Herod of that time.

And we read in Luke's gospel, chapter 23, you remember that when Pilate had started to examine Jesus, he himself, of course, was afraid as well and had all sorts of things going on in his mind. So he decided because he heard that Jesus belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod. And Herod began, we're told today that Herod was really glad when Pilate sent Jesus over to him, because he had wanted to see him for a long time. And he had wanted to actually ask him many questions.

And that's what he did. As Jesus stood in front of him, we read there in Luke 23, that he asked him many questions. And then it says, and he answered him nothing.

[ 9 : 18 ] For Herod, his opportunity was passed. God wasn't going to speak to him anymore. He was in the presence of a silent Christ.

And what a blessing it is, and what a cause of thankfulness for you and for me tonight. There is not a silent Christ, we know. There is a Jesus who speaks to us, who listens to us, who hears our cry, who bears our burden as we unfold the burden of our hearts to him.

That's the Jesus we intend remembering in his death in the Lord's Supper, and who speaks to us even through that Lord's Supper, of the things that belong to our salvation.

What a precious thing for yourself tonight, that you can say, I know that my Redeemer lives, that he speaks to me and I speak to him daily. So he's afraid of silence from God.

Lest I become like those who go down to the pit. What else is he afraid of? Well, the second thing, just in passing really, we'll just mention it in passing because I want to go on to the faith, the faith mentioned in the psalm.

[ 10 : 34 ] He's afraid of God being silent. He's also afraid of being included amongst the wicked. He says in verse 3, Do not drag me off with the wicked, with the workers of evil, who speak peace with their neighbors.

Now, of course, he's not really there doubting his salvation. It's not because he's actually, in any sense, doubting whether he's saved or not, whether God is his God or not.

But he is afraid of what might happen in God's judgment should God come to judge the place that he himself belongs to, the people that are with him, that may at that time have been his enemies. In any case, he's saying, what he's saying in verse 3, there is not so much from doubts about his relation to God, but from desire to live a godly life.

When you have a desire to live a godly life as you have, when you want to use the likes of the Lord's Supper to further your relationship with God and seek that God through that itself will add to your holiness and to your walk in holiness, well, you have alongside of that this very, very real request, if you like, Lord, please don't take me away.

[ 11 : 46 ] Don't drag me away with the wicked. Keep me on this path that I'm on. Add to my experience daily as I go on in case I should slide away and join up with the wicked.

Drag me not away with them because I want to live for you is what he means. It's a fear that comes from faith, not from doubt, not from something other than faith itself.

So that's his fear of God being silent, of being included amongst the wicked. But let's move on to his faith. And he mentions this in a number of different ways.

First of all, his faith in God. And secondly, his faith towards God. And thirdly, his faith for God's people.

His faith in God, his faith towards God, and his faith for God's people, for the benefit of God's people. Now, his faith in God because he mentions three attributes where you can see his faith in God brought out by these words that he describes God by or God's attributes.

[ 12 : 53 ] First of all, his rock. God is his rock. To you, O Lord. That's how he begins. To you, O Lord, I call my rock. Be not deaf to me.

And then in verse 7, you can see the Lord is my strength and my shield. Very similar kind of language. So expressing his faith in God by describing God as his rock.

And of course, that's a very familiar term by which God is described. Psalm 61 has a similar reference there. When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than myself.

You can relate to that. When you know your heart being overwhelmed, when the storms of life, when the waves are coming into your boat, and when you have that sense that you're sinking, well, you appeal to the Lord than to bring you to himself, to place you more visibly to yourself or to your own sense on the rock that he is.

Remember Isaiah as well. Isaiah chapter 26. You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon you, because he trusts in you.

[ 14 : 06 ] Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord is an everlasting rock. See what that's saying? You will keep him in perfect peace, because he trusts in you.

Now, don't take from that that it's his trust that lies as the basis of his peace, of his sense of security. You could put it this way in terms of the emphasis, what Isaiah is saying is, you will keep him in perfect peace, because it is in you that he trusts.

See, the emphasis is on the you, on God, not on the trust itself. And because God is the rock that he's then mentioning in the next verse, and because the trust is anchored in that rock, that's why he says, you will keep him in perfect peace.

The more you have in your sight the anchoring of your life to that rock that is God, the more you're kept in that peace of mind and that peace of soul, the more that you actually know of that itself being a means of security and of strength to you.

So he's saying here, God is his rock, and that's confirmed in your own experience. Where would you be tonight if God wasn't your rock? Where would I be if God wasn't such a strength as he is to us?

[ 15 : 32 ] Your faith in God recognizes the rock ship of God as the base, the foundation of your life's security. Secondly, he speaks of him as the shepherd of his people.

His faith in God is a faith in God as his shepherd. You find that in verse 9 where he comes to the end of the psalm, oh, save your people and bless your heritage. Be their shepherd and carry them forever.

And of course, again, we're very familiar with these very simple terms to describe God, yet they're so profound in all that they contain. He is saying here, he is the shepherd of his people.

That's where David finds, again, the care of his life and the care of his life being looked to by the shepherding God that he knows God to be.

You find, of course, that too in other parts of the Bible. Isaiah, in chapter 40, that chapter that deals with the greatness of God, with the immensity of God, the majesty and everything else of God in that respect.

[ 16 : 43 ] And yet in that as well, he refers to the Lord carrying, caring for his sheep, carrying the lambs, taking them up in his bosom.

The detailed, intense care of the shepherd for his people. And when you come to think of what the Lord's Supper sets out in the death of Christ being represented there and made over to us in what we do there, you remember that Christ included his death in his shepherding.

He's not just a shepherd to us after his own death and after his resurrection. It's not then that his shepherding kicks in, as it were. John chapter 10, that great chapter that deals with Jesus being the good shepherd.

You remember that in that chapter, it's very specially that he speaks of his death in relation to his shepherding in contrast to the other shepherds who weren't really shepherds of the sheep at all but led them astray and just did it for their own gain.

But I, he says, am the good shepherd. the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And he goes on later to say that this is why the Father loves him.

[ 18 : 02 ] Because I lay down my life that I might take it again. I have authority to lay it down. I have authority to take it again in resurrection.

This command I received from my Father. Who's speaking? The shepherd is. What's the shepherd saying? It's saying, he's saying that in shepherding his people, in providing for them, in caring for them, in becoming their security, it involved him laying down his life.

What you're remembering tomorrow, God willing, is the death of the shepherd. Not the death of one who became shepherd afterwards. But who came into this world as the shepherd of his people.

And who lived as their shepherd. Who died as their shepherd. Who rose again as their shepherd.

Isn't it really such a precious thought that you can say of all of these aspects of Christ's ministry that they are all to do with shepherding.

You cannot extract the shepherding of Christ from his life, from his obedience, from his death, from his resurrection. They all have that stamp of shepherding about them and at the heart of them.

[ 19 : 21 ] And aren't you, tonight, as you anticipate coming to the Lord's table, isn't that something that will be precious to you as you carry it forward, God willing, till tomorrow? And as you handle these elements of the bread and of the cup, that you can truly see, they represent my shepherd, but he's my shepherd in his death as he is in his resurrection and before it and after it.

And he's my shepherd now and he will be my shepherd until my life in this world is done and he will be my shepherd afterwards in eternity.

Because that's what Revelation reminds us of where in chapter 7 it speaks there of that vision of heaven and of the tears being wiped away by God and the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall pastor them, shall shepherd them.

There's the only place in all the universe where the Lamb is the shepherd. And he is that. As the Lamb who died, he is the shepherd still of his people throughout all eternity.

his people will be shepherded to living fountains of water, the flock of God fed by the shepherd and there's no end to that shepherding in glory.

[ 20 : 54 ] And that's what here is really rooted in the shepherding of God of his people. And the third way in which his faith shows in regard to faith in God is he speaks of God as the judge.

Now, these are imprecations, really, imprecations are what's usually used to describe these passages in the Psalms that are very difficult for us really to deal with because they call upon the judgment of the wicked, the judgment of his enemies for God to destroy them, for God to actually deal with them according to what they deserve.

That's really what he's saying. Verse 4, give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds. Give to them according to the work of their hands. Render them their due reward. And some people will say commentaries and Christians today will actually say that that sort of sentiment has no business whatsoever now in a Christian's mind after the time of Christ has

come, after Christ came and we have such an emphasis in Christ himself of loving even our enemies.

How can this actually have a place in our thoughts? Well, we have to be careful of course that we don't overstep the mark but it's not out of place. Of course, you don't want people destroyed. You don't want people other than saved. You don't want people to be dealt with by God in the way that they deserve just absolutely. What the psalmist is doing here is really expressing his incredible zeal for the glory of God and how he sees the glory of God attacked by those enemies and he wants that to end if at all possible even if it means God taking them away.

[ 22 : 36 ] Your own conscience as a Christian conscience protests against evil, protests against wickedness as you find it in the world especially when it is wickedness in terms of injustice not just against Christians but against any human being.

Your conscience really is moved and protests against that sort of thing when you see it and you want that to end. You want that to be done with.

You don't want to see any more of that. Of course, you want to see that person saved but you also realize that God as the judge has actually set a judgment day when he will judge every single person who ever lived and that judgment day is necessary for the sake of God's justice to be seen to be just.

It's for his own sake. That's really what David is anticipating in terms of the justice of God. He knows that God deals with people justly and he wants God to be vindicated, God to be proved just. and he wants that to be done even if it means that God will do away with these wicked workers of evil. There's a lot of difficulty in that as I've said but that's the gist of it.

[ 24 : 04 ] It's not because David's being vindictive. He wasn't that sort of man. It's just that he's consumed with thoughts of the glory of God and of how wickedness is so bent against God and the interests of God's people.

So he has faith in God as his rock, as the shepherd of his people and as the judge and you relate to these as you come to anticipate the Lord's supper. You come confessing God as your rock not because you're strong that's not why you come but because he is and you want him to make you stronger.

not because you're able to look after your own life but because he as the shepherd is and is doing that. Not because you have a right to actually call for the destruction of any other human being but because he has reserved the right to be the judge and is so and you honor him in all aspects of his being including his judgment.

So God faith in God faith then towards God secondly in this faith relating to God it's faith towards God and there are two vital activities that you see in relation to that.

First of all is prayer. You see the way the psalm begins again where he says verse 2 hear the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cry to you for help when I lift up my hands towards your most holy sanctuary.

[ 25 : 34 ] And so that aspect of his faith being toward God is expressed through prayer. as in many other places in the Bible you read about the lifting up of hands in prayer.

In the Psalms it's elsewhere as well. And when you read that think of the prophet or whoever it is coming before God with hands upstretched like this not like this but like this empty hands hands waiting to be filled.

that was the posture that they associated with coming to seek God's blessing coming to seek God to fill their lives with blessing. They were coming to him with open hands with hands outstretched but empty and that itself indicating their awareness of how God needed to fill their hands how God needed to fill them or else they'd remain empty.

And that's what we relate to even if we don't though there'd be nothing wrong with actually praying with literally outstretched hands but the sentiment is there as you come before God you say Lord if you don't fill my life with blessing I will be empty and I'll remain empty.

If you don't give me wisdom I won't have wisdom enough of my own. If you don't give me love I won't be able to exercise love the way I should and so on.

[ 27 : 01 ] You come with empty hands. You come to the Lord's supper with outstretched hands. You come to ask God to bless this ordinance to you to fill your soul to feed upon Christ to receive of his benefits and you come therefore with outstretched hands.

But you see it saying towards your most holy sanctuary as you see there in verse 2 or your innermost sanctuary could also translated. Why is that actually mentioned? Well because that's what the psalmist associates with the very center point of the people's relation to God and his to them.

This is where sacrifice is made. This is where atonement is made. This is where God has these sacrifices brought to him and especially on the day of atonement into the holy of holies where the high priest came with the blood of the sacrifice to represent the people before God seeking their forgiveness their salvation.

Remember Jonah down the depths of the sea where he describes in chapter 2 the prayer that he made to God and his extremity.

[ 28 : 26 ] He says he looked towards your holy sanctuary. His thoughts were upon where atonement was made.

His thoughts were upon reconciliation and what God had provided for that. And that too is what you relate to the Lord's Supper to.

You come with that prayer with your hands empty and you relate to where God dwells, where the sanctuary is, where Jesus now is in the sanctuary of heaven and where that atonement has been accepted that you remember in the Lord's Supper.

And where because of that blessing flows to you from the throne of God, you come with prayer. You come with praise. Secondly, towards God and praise.

Verses 6 and 7 where experience and emotion and expression are all joined together as he comes there before God. Blessed be the Lord, for he has heard the voice of my pleas.

[ 29 : 29 ] In my heart trusts in him, my heart exults. With my song I give thanks to him. He gives thanks with a song as well as with his words. And you know we're glad that we still associate singing with the worship of God.

That it is an essential element in our expression of thanks to God. And how much the poorer would our services be without singing. It doesn't mean you have to be a good singer.

It doesn't mean you have to have a great voice in order to sing and participate in the singing of praise. The opportunity to sing is there and we join in it together.

The singing tonight was as it usually is, very good. An expression of your heart's delight, an expression of your thankfulness to God. That's what the psalmist is saying, that's what David is saying.

My heart exalts, therefore with a song, with my song, I give thanks to him. So it's faith in God, it's faith towards God, it's faith in God as his rock, as his shepherd, as his judge.

[ 30 : 38 ] It's faith towards God through prayer and through praise. And finally it's faith for God's people or for their benefit. Look at verses 8 and 9. This is not just for his own personal benefit that he's dealing with God like this.

The Lord is the strength of his people. He is the saving refuge of his anointed. Oh, save your people and bless your heritage. Be their shepherd and carry them forever.

As he brings his own personal needs and praise to God, he embraces the people of God in what he's doing. And you know you do that as well, I know, with your prayers.

But you also do that in terms of coming to the Lord's table. One of the things that the Apostle Paul pointed to when he wrote to the Corinthians, amongst the other abuses of the Lord's Supper that they were guilty of, they were guilty of just going their own way and having their own cliques and their own divisions and not really meaningfully being a fellowship as they ought to have been.

And so he said to them towards the end of 1 Corinthians 11 that when you come, wait for one another. Value the presence of one another.

[ 32 : 03 ] You're not just coming to the Lord's table for your own sake. You are that. That's a huge privilege. That's a great advantage. It's a wonderful thing. You're coming with your own personal relationship to Jesus and you want to make the most of that and you want to meet with him and you want to tell him what he means to you.

In the silence of your own heart you deal with him. Your prayer goes up to him. Your praise there as well as you sit still at the Lord's table and as you come to take these elements.

Your heart is active. Your mind is active. But you also carry God's people with you. You've waited for them. They're together. They're with you.

your heart is sore when others that you know should be there are not. Because that's something that affects the fellowship.

That affects it in a way that really leaves an open wound if you like. That God himself tells us we need to heal that. We need to close that up.

[ 33 : 11 ] God's love. And if you are here tonight and you've not been to the Lord's table yet. You've not taken communion yet though.

You know that's what's in your heart. That you would dearly like to do it. Close that wound in the fellowship. Come with the others who are waiting for you.

and take your place with the Lord's people in remembering him in his death. You belong to his flock. And the Lord takes them as he says as his heritage.

And when we are the heritage of the Lord that is surely one of the great privileges of life that God says you are my heritage. You belong to me.

You are my people. I've taken you as my heritage. And you have taken me as your God.

[ 34 : 15 ] So do this in remembrance of him. May he bless to us his word this evening. Let's sing in conclusion now to God's praise from Psalm 28, the psalm that we've been looking at.

On page 238 we'll sing from verse 6 to the end of the psalm. Forever blessed be the Lord for graciously he heard the voice of my petitions and prayers did regard.

The Lord's my strength and shield my heart upon him did rely and I am helped hence my heart with joy exceedingly. Verses 6 to 9 let's stand to sing these verses.

Let's stand to sing these verses. Forever blessed be the Lord for gracious the Lord the Lord the Lord of my petition and prayers did regard the Lord's my strength and shield my heart upon him did rely and I have helped this my heart touch on exceedingly and with my song

I will embrace that friend this Lord alone he also is the shining strength of his anointed one for thine own people do thou shake let thine and heaven and God them also do go out of and and others and other lives other as heavens and to to our

[ 37 : 14 ] ING through and to prepare hands ■■■■ our men and to , and the pope or