

Psalm 128: *Shalom*, part 1

Sunday, May 22, 2016

Psalm 128 as we said a couple weeks ago, is a **Psalm of ascent**. We said that this Psalm was one of 15 Psalms of ascent that may have been sung by the Jewish people as they made their pilgrimages from their hometown ascending UP to Jerusalem for each of the 3 Jewish feasts. The big picture of this Psalm, is one of our ascent to the holy city. We are making our ascent to Zion. God is sanctifying us, making us holy, conforming us to the image of Jesus to be like Him, as we make our pilgrimage through this world and ascend to our heavenly City where the faithful gather together in the presence of our King, to worship Him forever. We're marching to Zion. **Q: What are you marching to when you wake up each day?**

We know where the Psalms of ascent are taking the people... to the hill called Mount Zion, where the city of Jerusalem is located. Jerusalem, is the city of *salem* or *Shalom*. The Hebrew term, ***Shalom***, means **peace**, not just peace of mind... but a total peace. Notice how this Psalm begins and ends. It begins in verse 1 with *blessed is everyone...* and ends in verse 6 *peace be upon Israel...* IOW, it begins with the state of true peace (blessed) and ends with a prayer for true peace. In **Psalm 122:6**, we're told to *pray for the peace of Jerusalem!*

What Shalom is

Shalom or **peace** was rich term that meant health, security, tranquility, absolute flourishing, joy and bliss. (Far richer than our simple, 'how's it going?') The root word for *Shalom* means to be whole, to be complete or fulfilled. To have *Shalom* meant to have everything you need, b/c the Hand of the Lord was with you.

The theme of **Psalm 128** is *Shalom*. The entire Psalm is a picture of what an individual, a family, a city, even a nation with God's shalom can be. We're ascending to the city of Shalom.

How Shalom comes

1) Shalom comes through *fighting men for the Lord*

Psalm 128:4 – *Behold, thus shall **the man** be blessed who fears the Lord.*

Although Psalm 128 begins with '*Blessed is everyone* (generic; individual)...' It has a pointed target audience in mind. Verse 4 - '*thus shall the man be blessed...*' The Psalmist is talking to everyone generically, but he really has one particular group he's addressing... **MEN!** You see, *the man*, in 128:4 is referenced in verse 3 where it says: '*...your wife will be fruitful within your house... and your children will be like olive shoots around your table...*' Its blatantly obvious, we're talking to husbands and fathers, the spiritual heads of households. The Hebrew term used for **man**, is very masculine and it means *strength* or *valiant* or *warrior*.... They are **fighters**, they don't flee. It's not referencing soft-spined, effeminate men who refuse to be men... These are Ephesians 6 armor of God men. They are broken, incomplete men... in fact, they are very aware of their weakness, but these men know they *are strong in the Lord and the strength of His might (Eph. 6:10)*.

In Psalm 128, God is calling fighting husbands and fighting fathers, fighting men, who are willing to die for the *Shalom*, the fulfillment of God's peace for their family, for the church, the city and the nations.

2) Shalom comes through the *fear* the LORD

Psalm 128:1 – *Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord...*

Q: What's it mean to fear the Lord?

Fear in the Greek is *phobeo*. **Q: Do you have a phobia?** Some of you men are afraid of your wife and/or your children... to cross them or speak truth to them because of a phobia of rejection or a lack of peace. **Q: What do our phobias tell us?** They tell us we're not in control; that we're weak. If your claustrophobic, tight spaces have power over you... they control you, because you don't have the ability to control getting out of them. When it comes to tight spaces, you're weak, incomplete. If you have a phobia of rejection that means someone's approval has power over you... they control you. When it comes to approval, you're weak, incomplete. **BUT, to fear the LORD** means that the LORD has power over you; He is controlling you... b/c you know you're weak and incomplete in His presence. And b/c you do, you find perfect peace, Shalom, in Him.

Here are three examples from scripture of men, fighters, who thought they were complete in themselves until they saw and feared the LORD.

Job 38:1-3; 42:1-9 – When Job was justifying himself before the Lord for his own righteousness, God showed up in the whirlwind and questioned him. His final response after 4 chapters of hearing God's voice: ***I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.***

When Job saw the Lord, he came un-glued...he realized he wasn't whole or complete... he despised himself. Despising oneself is simply the response of someone who has lost control (I hate myself, I can't manage my life). Job saw himself in the presence of the Lord and feared Him and the LORD lifted the burden of his self-justification, and brought true *Shalom, peace, and completeness* to his life and family.

Isaiah 6:1-9

In the year that King Uzziah died Isaiah saw the Lord seated on the throne, high and lifted up, and it was more than he could handle. As he heard the seraphim calling out, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory... He said, ***Woe is me! For I am undone***.... He saw himself for the first time, in the presence of holiness, and He lost control of his prophetic ministry. And all he could do was cry out in repentance. Isaiah saw himself in the presence of the Lord and feared Him and the LORD lifted the burden of his unclean lips and brought true *Shalom, peace, and completeness* to his prophetic ministry.

And in the NT we read about Saul, later the Apostle Paul...

Acts 9:1-9, 18-20

Saul was breathing out threats against the believers in Christ until he encountered the LORD in a bright light that blinded him. He saw the LORD, because he couldn't see anything else. And when he saw himself in the light of the LORD's presence, he feared the LORD, and the LORD lifted his burden. Saul repented of his Pharisee religion, bringing true *Shalom, peace, and completeness* to the Apostle Paul's mission.

Each one of these men thought they could control their lives, until they met the One who controlled them and their circumstances. *It's a frightening thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.* You see, every phobia in your life is sent by God to prove to you that you have no control over your life... you are not in control of your health, your wife, your children, your income, your comfort, your personal peace, your reputation, or your future. The fact that you have these phobias is God's grace reminding you He's the One that *upholds the universe by the word of His power*; that He's the One *in Whom all things hold together*; that He's the One *who works all things together for good to those that love Him and are called according to His purpose*. This is what it looks like when real men of God fear the Lord. They see themselves in the presence of a holy God (they're not comparing themselves to others, but to God alone). And in doing so, they see how broken, fragile and incomplete they are, and all they can do is cry out for mercy (*Have mercy on me, oh LORD*). And when they do, they find His redemption which brings His *Shalom, peace, and completeness* to your life.

And then, to fear the LORD, means you will follow Him by walking in His ways...

3) Shalom comes through ***following*** the LORD

Psalm 128:1 – *Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord; who walks in His ways.*

What are the ways of the LORD? Well, when Job, Isaiah and Saul saw the LORD, they came unglued, and what did the LORD do for them? What they could not do for themselves. **He lifted their burden.** This is what the Good News is... the Gospel... the Good News that brings great joy. We always attribute following the Lord with obedience, and certainly following the LORD means obeying Him. Jesus said, *whoever loves me will obey my commandments*. The problem is how we interpret this. We think obedience or following the Lord begins with His commandments... His moral laws, IOW... God's good advice. But truly, when Jesus said that whoever loves me will obey my commandments, He was saying the obedience to God, begins with love for God.

You see, fear of the LORD should produce a love for the LORD which leads to obedience to the LORD. Understanding and knowing love for God, b/c of who He is (**holy**) and b/c of who we are in His presence (**undone; incomplete**), and b/c of what He has done for us (**lifted our burden, making us at peace with God**)... only this produces delightful obedience.

When we think that following the LORD means seeking His good advice first, or giving others the Lord's good advice... we're not helping them get their burdens lifted... we're casting more burdens on them.

I.E.: If someone came in with a note that said, your child is missing. Immediately a phobia would fall on you. Something you treasure is now way out of your control. So, let's say I said, okay, wait... let's think about this... and I shared with you that 99% of missing children missing in the U.S. are usually found. Is that encouraging? How about if I said, I think it would be appropriate to call out an Amber Alert and let's organize search parties to go out and find this child. Is that helpful? What if I said, you know, let's just stop right now and pray diligently for this child to be found. Surely that's helpful? BUT, what if, after hearing your child is missing, Willa stood up in the back and said, "No, they're not, I have the child

with me right here!” Which would rather hear... all my good advice or Willa’s good news? Which one lifts your burden?

Tim Keller asks this question:

“How do you feel when you’re given good advice on how to live? Someone says, “Here’s the love you ought to have, or the integrity you ought to have,” and maybe they illustrate high moral standard by telling a story of some great hero. But when you hear it, how does it make you feel? Inspired... sure. But... do you feel your burdens have fallen off? Do you feel as if something great has been done for you and you’re not afraid anymore? You’re not a slave anymore? Of course you don’t. B/C good advice weighs you down: This is how I have to live. It’s not a gospel. The gospel is that God connects to you not on the basis of what you’ve done (or haven’t done) but on the basis of what Jesus has done for you in the presence of a holy God.”

On the cross, before He breathed His last and died, Jesus said, **‘It is finished!’** IOW... it is fulfilled, it is complete, *Shalom*. Jesus stepped into the presence of His holy Father, became sin for us by taking His holy wrath, and then bearing and lifting your burden. Now you, as messed up, as broken and fragile and incomplete as you are... you now have *Shalom* with God... you are complete in Christ. Your burden is lifted. Now what? Jesus made it clear... *Deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and **follow Me... obey all that I have commanded you.** Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.* The *Shalom* that Jesus offers at the cross, frees me to lose my life by dying to myself and my control... and going and bearing another’s burden. That’s really what evangelism and any kind of obedience boils down to. Jesus fought and defeated sin and satan to lift my burden. Therefore, I am now free to bear another’s burden. I can’t lift anyone’s burden. Only the Gospel does that. Good advice doesn’t do it.

This is what happened to Job, Isaiah, and the Apostle Paul...

Job prayed for his three ‘judgmental’ friends. He didn’t have to avoid them or rebuke them. He simply died to controlling his life, and was free to care for them, to pray for them... to bear their burden.

Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, *“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”* Then Isaiah said, **“Here I am! Send me.”** And he went freely to bear the burden of a people whom God said would hear but never listen and see but never come to understand. He followed the Lord, walking in His steps.

Paul – After Paul met God, it says **immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”** Once he realized God controlled the planet and his life, he went from being the chief burden maker to the chief burden bearer of the Gentile church, freely proclaiming the burden-lifting Gospel.

Galatians 6:2 - *Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*