

# *Ascension Lutheran Church*

*Pastor James's Sermon for the week of August 23, 2009*

## Lacking No Good Thing (Psalm 34:9-11)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the:

“Fear the LORD, you His saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.”

This is the text.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, In the Bible we hear the words, “fear the LORD”, especially in the Old Testament. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom”, as the first chapter of Proverbs says. Our text today in Psalm 34 also concerns the fear of the LORD. It says, “Fear the LORD, you His saints, for those who fear Him lack nothing. The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.” This may sound strange to us even though we have heard it many times. How can fearing God connect with lacking no good thing? Is it that God provides for those who are afraid of Him? Does fearing God result in His protection and care?

It is easy to misunderstand what it means to fear the Lord. In the Bible it is part of having a healthy relationship with God. But sometimes we get the wrong idea. People sometimes think that fearing God means that God is holding us ransom or forcing us to come to Him out of fear. In the law books there's a name for a situation like this. It's called extortion. Like when a gangster type thug comes into a little neighbourhood shop and says, “Look, I have an insurance plan here I want to sell you. You give me the money I want, and I'll make sure nothing happens to your place. But if you don't give me what I want, I'll make sure that something does happen to your place.” Out of fear, the shopkeeper forks over the money so he is safe and sound. The shopkeeper doesn't want to cross the big thug or he'll get stepped on. But on the other hand, if he gets in good with him, he'll hopefully watch out for the shopkeeper.

This is not how we want to see our relationship with God but there is a temptation to see it this way. A person gets sick, loses his job, or faces other struggles and he begins to wonder why God is bullying him.

“What does God want from me?” we ask. “If I just did enough, prayed enough, or gave enough money, then I might be able to pay God off.” Or worse yet, we may feel that we have done enough. “I've been a good Christian. I go to church. I give my offerings. I pray; I attend meetings; I do my churchly duties; I pay my taxes; I take care of my family. Why does God allow these things to happen to me?” So we think of God as an extortionist; someone who squeezes what He wants out of people. This kind of fear is a fear without trust.

But true Biblical fear of God actually dissolves all our fears away. This fear comes first by recognizing and confessing our own heart's lack of trust in Him and when we admit that God is completely trustworthy, altogether good, and completely deserving of all our devotion. But then looking at our own hearts and realizing that what God truly deserves we don't have and we can't offer. No matter how "good" we try to be, it's never good enough to match the glory and goodness that God truly deserves. And even the best we have to offer is tainted with sin in the eyes of our good and holy God. Realizing this, we are rightly afraid because we know that if we can't pay what we owe, we deserve what we get. Every hardship and struggle is well deserved.

Jesus told a parable along these lines. A servant owed his king millions of dollars, but there was no way he could pay it. The problem was not that the king was crook or dishonest. The problem was that the king was honest and just and that the man honestly and justly deserved to lose everything for not paying the king exactly what he owed him. He was terrified of the king because the king was good, righteous, and just, and because he was in debt. He knew the king could rightly give him just what he deserved, which was prison and the loss of all he owned.

This kind of fear can only be dissolved by one thing and that is mercy. The only hope is if the king cancels the debt.

Friends, when fears loom in our lives and we begin to wonder why God would allow us suffering, loneliness, and deep disappointments; when fears press on us and lead us to question God's motives and intentions, what do we do?

The answer is we confess our sin. God is good and honest and trustworthy and He would never treat us unjustly. So what happens when we confess our sin to Him? - When we say "we are by nature sinful and unclean...We have not love you with our whole heart...We justly deserve your present and eternal punishment" – when we come to repentance, and have a change of direction and leave our sins at the cross He does not give us the sentence we deserve and He gives us grace to follow Him.

He says, "I forgive you", as He in effect says to us at the beginning of every Sunday Service, "I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

But let's not stop there! For what lies behind this forgiveness of God is wonderful news! With forgiveness comes God's love. And His love is what moved Him to pay your debt for you. God took the sentence you and I deserve. When Jesus was arrested and beaten, and whipped and nailed to the cross He showed that the heart of God is mercy. He showed that He would rather die in our place than see us perish in our sins.

Now here for certain is the God we can trust with our lives. He is the same God who comes to us now and gives us His body and blood in Communion and who is with us always to empower us for His service.

Dear friends, if we have such a God as this, then do we need anything else really? Psalm 23 says, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not lack nothing. Even if we lost

everything in this world though it would be painful we would still have the Lord and His Kingdom. And with the fellowship of Christ you truly have the most precious riches in the world.

The psalm in our text likewise says, "Those who fear the Lord lack nothing." To fear the Lord means to be in awe of Him, to want Him near and give Him utmost reverence and respect and honour. We stand not only in awe of His power and might; we stand in awe of His tender mercy and compassion. For we are truly in awe of His grace in Jesus who suffered, died and rose for us and who is ready to forgive and set us on His right path and give us strength to walk with Him each day. Indeed, there is no lack with this God of mercy.

Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.