

“Enduring Fire: Praising a Faithful God – Life and Purpose”

Scripture: Psalm 66

Graphic: fire, hands raised, life, offering, worship

Key Verses: 8-9 – Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept us among the living, and has not let our foot slip.

Theme:

1) Introduction

- a) Enduring Fire...Praising a Faithful God...that’s our current sermon series focusing on what God IS and what He DOES and our REPOSE TO it as we live out our lives in this world...
- b) And THROUGHOUT the Bible we see that God is ever-present, faithful, and consistent; He never changes, He does what He says He will do, He never waivers from being holy and powerful – he is an enduring fire.
- c) Fire has power – light and heat! It has power to do massive amounts of work, and also has power to do massive amounts of damage.
- d) When that fire burns in our lives for GOOD – when we allow the light and heat of God’s fire to work in our lives – then there are certain things that happen IN our lives. Stuff...happens! Great stuff!
- e) Psalm 33, we looked at last week - that fire, unleashed in our lives, produces safety and security from the enemy and all the circumstances that would otherwise tear us apart and leave us broken and lost. When we are swimming in net-infested waters, we need to be near God so we don’t get trapped and tangled. We can’t go it alone, but must rely on the safety and security of our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
- f) Safety and security are some of the most basic needs in our lives. If we feel secure in our homes, we have a sense of peace and wholeness. That’s why home security systems installation is now a multi-billion dollar industry. We crave safety and security.
- g) When we accept the safety and security that **God** offers us, through Jesus Christ, we gain confidence and trust IN GOD and God’s plan for salvation, and we’re more willing and able to praise our faithful God. To worship!
- h) But safety and security are just one piece of the puzzle...

- i) As attractive as it may be, if all we had was a bunch of safe and secure people in the church, we might be content, but we'd never go anywhere or DO anything to advance the kingdom of God. We'd be hunkered down in our little corner of the world, safe and protected – and ineffective at working with Jesus to fulfill the great commission.
- j) Now, let me just say, I'm reminded this week of all the pictures and video images of people in the Midwest and South. Real people have been hunkered down in shelters and basements in fear because of the incredible power of the tornados that ripped through their towns...that destroyed their houses. Maybe even some of us right here were hunkered down in our homes this week...
- k) Safety and security are essential for life! But the problem with hunkering down is that's pretty much ALL you can do. When the tornado sirens go off, you don't see people, like, making appointments to get their cars fixed. You don't see people making vacation plans or even sharing special times with friends. When the siren goes off, you RUN FOR SAFETY, right? And that's all you do! And if that's all we ever did in life, then we wouldn't be able to do anything else. Thank God that storms pass and people can begin to get their lives going again.
- l) So, even though we need safety and security, and when we choose to stand close to God's enduring fire, we find that, we can't JUST have safety and security. There's life after the storms...
- m) And so, open your Bibles with me to Psalm chapter 66...
- n) Today's message is about having purpose in life. It's about turning toward the enduring fire of God that's burning in our lives and beginning to find meaning and purpose for every day – even the days when it seems like we're hunkered down, or caught in the net...
- o) Let's pray...
- p) Look at Psalm 66, verse 8

2) Scripture

- a) **Read verses 8-9**

- i) Anybody here today ever do The Wave? You know, you're sitting at a football game or hockey game and all of a sudden you see this movement off to your left and you see people standing, putting their hands in the air, and it's coming your way! Wanna try it? OK...maybe not...
- ii) A couple times, at a baseball game, there would be this crazy guy with no shirt on (usually) down in front, **RUNNING** from side-to-side trying to get the crowd to start the wave. Gotta be one of the hardest jobs in the world – getting everyone in the crowd to do the same thing, just because this crazy guy says so.
- iii) The psalmist in verse 8 is trying to get us to do the Worship Wave. Seriously! He's trying to get us to all do the same thing at the same time! To bless God...and let the sound of his praise be heard!
- iv) He's our cheerleader for worship! I asked you last week to pray about one thing that holding you back from that next step in worship...I pray the Holy Spirit is still working on that in you. This is a great picture of someone who is encouraging and cheerleading the church to praise God!
- v) Why? Verse 9 – **BECAUSE WE ARE ALIVE!** We praise God because he has kept us among the living! Which, in this life, is **WAY** better than the alternative, right?
- vi) This section is clearly a reference to the Exodus when God's people were brought out of slavery in Egypt – so that God's plan for His people could be carried out. And while they were in the wilderness, waiting to go into the Promised Land, they were given everything they needed **TO LIVE**. So through slavery, famine, hardship, near death experiences, providence...he has kept us secure and alive!
- vii) Bless God, people!
- viii) But, still, maybe we're not convinced...look at verse 10

b) Read verses 10-12

- i) This is an awesome prayer!
- ii) And sometimes, when we pray, it's not all about what's gone right in our lives...and it's not all about what we want God to **CHANGE** in our lives...or change in the people **IN** our lives.

iii) Sometimes, like the psalm writer, we list off the things that have happened to us – that God has allowed to be part of our experience – and then praise Him for it.

iv) First of all, God, YOU TESTED US – like silver is tested in the fire.

(1) One way to get impurities out of the metal that makes silver and gold and precious metals is to burn off the impurities at REALLY HIGH TEMPERATURES...like 1,200 degrees Celsius!

(2) That's intense...but it leads to something pure and valuable...used for special occasions.

(3) God tested and tried the people of Israel by allowing them to be in slavery and by allowing them to endure the hardships of being taken out of slavery into the wilderness...all for a purpose. But it was hard!

v) Secondly, God, you BROUGHT US INTO THE NET.

(i) In Psalm 33, last week, the net was the trap that was laid by the enemy to try to destroy us. It's something we get caught in when we swim in net-infested waters. Why would a loving and merciful God allow us to get caught in the net? It's like, why do bad things happen to good people?

(ii) This is a time of trial. Why did Jesus have to go into the wilderness to be tempted and tried by the devil? Why did guys like Stephen and Paul suffer for their faith?

1. These things happen in our lives, not because God is punishing us for our disobedience, but because God is in control. And ultimately, when we put our trust in Him, our trials - which are mostly caused by sin in the world, either our own or someone else's – become lessons to learn and times of great growth.

2. Paul tells us in Romans 5:3-5 *And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us*

- (b) God, you took us into the net...
- (c) Thirdly...God, you LAID BURDENS ON OUR BACKS...we were slaves.
- (d) And verse 12, you let people RIDE OVER OUR HEADS. Basically, God, you let people trample us into the dirt. And step on us for their own gain. We were crushed...
- (e) We went through FIRE and through WATER. The fire is reference probably to the pillar of fire and the cloud that led the people in the wilderness. The water is reference to their escape from Egypt and the river through which the people went to safety.
- (f) God, you allowed ALL THIS to happen to us...(and remember, we're in the midst of praise and worship, here)...you allowed ALL THIS.
- (g) YET! Underline that word... YET...you have brought us OUT of ALL THAT to a spacious place.
- (h) And when God brings you OUT, from all the trials and persecution, the burdens and things that weigh us down and cause us to lose sight of our lives and purpose, to a spacious place...there is FREEDOM! For the people of Israel, there was a sense of anticipation...they couldn't wait to see what God would do next! So much potential.
- (i) It's like waiting for a baby to be born...or waiting to graduate from high school...or waiting for your wedding day. There is so much anticipation and potential just...almost...here!
- (j) And freedom to dream of a new reality, potential for what could be, and trust in the Lord's plan for your life, are the essential building blocks for purpose and meaning in life.
- (k) When we're trapped, we can't dream about a new reality. When we're backed into a small corner, all we want to do is get out.
- (l) But when God brings us into a spacious place, and proves that He has been faithful in the past, and we begin to trust in His safety and security...our lives become filled with purpose.

(m) What's our response? Well, there are two responses...the first one...look at Verse 13

c) Read verses 13-15

- i) God has brought us through to a spacious place...through our hardships and struggles and things we don't understand...and He has given us purpose...a mission...a task...
- ii) What should we do? **WORSHIP!**
- iii) Make offerings like God asks – of devotion, vows, and promises to God – with integrity.
- iv) This isn't some prayer that we launch us when we're in trouble and then forget about when God rescues us! This is following through on giving praise to God when we are on the other side of a trial. Don't be the kind of Christian that uses God to get out of a bind and then pretend like it was you who made it possible. It's false...give glory in all things.
- v) Be faithful and trustworthy...
- vi) Purpose comes in life when we stop focusing on ourselves, and turn our attention to God and other people.
- vii) I've already talked about the first one...to worship and praise God.
- viii) The second response to God's freedom is telling others...look at verse 16...

d) Read verses 16-20

- i) People, we have a story to tell to the nations...we have a message of hope that is born out of the trials we face and the times that we relied on God's grace to get us through them. And if we haven't gone through the trial, we know someone who has...and we have the biblical witness of countless people who have lived and died in the faith.
- ii) Just like we can't be hunkered down in our safety and security, we can't be just worshippers and not proclaimers of the Good News!
- iii) Jesus commanded us to **LOVE GOD** and **LOVE OTHERS**.

- iv) The psalmist is telling others exactly what God has done...that he cried out and God heard his prayer. That he was faithful to confess sin and ask God for forgiveness and be reconciled so God could work in that relationship for good.
- v) And the psalmist simply raises his hands and turns toward God's enduring fire and says...verse 20
- vi) Praise God for His faithfulness and steadfast love!

3) Application

- a) I did a quick search on YouTube with the question: What is the purpose of life? And all the top results were either psycho babble about the universe and that which binds us together, or were from Swammi's offering the Zen Buddhist perspective devoid of one true God.
- b) And it's really trendy to ask that question and expect some incredibly deep and complicated response to finding your inner self.
- c) But for the mother who sits on her bed and cries alone because her children are grown and she finds no purpose anymore...or the man who has worked his whole life only to discover he has lost his relationships because he worked so many long hours...or to the college student who is on her own for the first time and can't seem to make friends...or the widow who had spent 40 years loving someone who is now gone...what is the purpose of life?
- d) The answer is not found in anything other than Jesus Christ. The answer is not found in self-help books and videos. It's found in the Bible and in the stories of those who are living their lives as a living testimony to the One who has been ever-present and faithful.
- e) Our main purpose in life and the main reason that God gives us life in the first place, is, according to Jesus, to love God and love others. That's our purpose.
- f) All the other things we do in life – jobs, playtime, service, whatever – ought to be means to either love God or love others. Doing things strictly for ourselves is never an option in the economy of Jesus. Jesus' life exemplified what should be the purpose of our own lives...and that is: loving God by giving God glory and honor and praise...and then living life with the PURPOSE of loving others.

- g) And like the psalmist wrote about, inviting others to be part of the celebration of loving God and then equipping each other and encouraging each other to go out into Panama and go out into the surrounding communities and going out into your world to tell other people (1) that there IS a God and He's done some pretty amazing things in my life; and (2) the salvation that He offers through the Son Jesus Christ is not some Zen answer to why the universe was created, but the most concrete and definitive final answer to MY sin and the sin of all humanity. And when we are filled with THAT forgiveness and grace, we are free – in that spacious place – to allow God to shine his light and heat through us.
- h) And we can tell them, “You're invited to come and hear and experience the love from God and other people.”

4) Conclusion

- a) For everyone today who has lost purpose in life...come to Jesus.
- b) For everyone today who is on a plateau and is searching for the meaning of the next phase of life...come to Jesus.
- c) For all who are stuck or depressed or sad...come to Jesus.
- d) If you want to lay something down that is blocking you from a total commitment to Christ...bring it. This is between you and God.
- e) And for every one of us, who are ready to claim this simple desire to have the purpose for life that God offers in Jesus Christ...come and pray with me. This is our spacious place where God frees us and equips us to love Him and love others.
- f) I don't do this every week, but I feel led today to ask for anyone who wants to accept Christ as their personal savior, to accept the life purpose that He brings, to either come forward with others who come, or remain seated and simply pray this prayer with me. If you make a decision to give your life more fully to Jesus today...please let me know so I can pray for you...
- g) Come kneel and draw close to God's enduring fire...praise our faithful God for all He has done...and as we sing, we free to stay and thank Him.
- h) Let's pray...come as you are led by the Lord...