

“Enduring Fire: Praising a Faithful God – Safety and Security

Scripture: Psalm 31

Graphic: fire, hands raised, rock, shelter, fortress

Key Verses: 5 Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

Theme: God’s faithfulness is ever-present and ever-lasting in the good times and bad. Our response is praise for safety and security that come when we trust our lives in the Lord’s hands.

1) Introduction

- a) Kind of excited that spring is finally here...can only mean one thing: summer camping trips!
- b) Stacy and I will once again have the great pleasure at the end of June to spend 6 days in the forest with 28 teenagers and four other adults at Camp Findley.
- c) And, this year, for the first time, the Camp Findley staff has been sending out surveys to the kids who have signed up to come to camp. On the survey it asks, “What is it that you are looking forward to DOING at camp this year.”
- d) Got a bunch of different responses like: make new friends, waterskiing, swimming, snack bar... But one of the responses was a little alarming... from a kid that had just two words (this is great). He wrote: make...fire...!
- e) Seriously...MAKE FIRE! And because I’m a bit of a pyromaniac myself, I was totally interested in who this kid was...
- f) Now...I should tell you that the name on the survey form was Benjamin Taylor... so if you see that kid, please don’t encourage him.
- g) Campfires are the best part of camping, right? Campfire for Christ is the first weekend in August again this year...great time around a fire...
- h) Fire is energy! – heat and light! We can see and feel the effects of the chemical reaction that is fire!
- i) And it’s powerful! And it’s mysterious! It can be a little scary at times! But it also gives us warmth and security...and works in our lives for all sorts of great blessings.

- j) And I got to thinking...Can we think of God like a fire? Certainly, there are places in the Bible that relate God to fire – like Moses and burning bush. And if God is like a fire, it can't be just any old campfire. Our God is eternal...He is an **enduring fire** that never goes out and never gets bigger or smaller. He's the fire that burns from eternity past to eternity future. He is ALWAYS present...ALWAYS burning... ALWAYS perfectly ready to send POWER into your life! He is steadfast and consistent! He's an Enduring Fire!
- k) And so, I've chosen to title our new sermon series Enduring Fire. Because God wants to be burning hot and bright in your life right now.
- l) But sometimes we walk away from the fire, don't we? Sometimes we stand outside the circle and the power of the fire diminishes in our lives. We get caught up in the life-stuff that distracts us from God being active and powerful in our lives. God doesn't change...we do.
- m) But God is ever-present and always ready, and loves us...He is faithful! God's most prominent characteristic in the Biblical narrative is His faithfulness. When the people of Israel repeatedly rejected God in the OT...He was faithful and called them back to His grace and mercy. The fire never changed...the distance the people were FROM the fire changed.
- n) When Jesus was hanging on the cross, it seemed to the disciples that God's light and heat were fading...but God was faithful to fulfill the promises.
- o) The early church struggled to begin the ministry that Jesus taught them to lead. And the Holy Spirit came to guide them and encourage them. This FIRE from God is about the power of God present and active in our lives – through the Words of scripture, through the living Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit.
- p) And our response is to live holy lives with Christ at the center...praising God for His faithfulness.
- q) And so the subtitle of the sermon series is Praising a Faithful God. This is our response to God's enduring fire in our lives. Because God is faithful and steadfast, our response is to praise Him.
- r) I'm not sure about you, but I find that I don't praise God enough in my life. Maybe like me, your prayer times become petitions and requests...they get

stuck in the list of things that we want God to do FOR us and we forget to spend time simply praising God...trusting God with the list.

- s) But we have SO MUCH for which we can praise God...and so that's what this series is about...praising a faithful God.
- t) And as we read five different chapters from the book of Psalms, we will be reminded of ten different reasons why we are compelled to praise God!
 - i) For victory and confidence He gives...
 - ii) For creation and provision in our lives...
 - iii) For power and strength in the Lord...
 - iv) For life and purpose, we praise Him.
 - v) And, today, for safety and security.
- u) Open your Bibles with me to Psalm 31...
- v) Let's pray...

2) Scripture

a) Read verses 1-2

- i) Think of a time in your life when you were in some serious trouble. Maybe it was some kind of legal trouble or whatever.
- ii) I haven't been in too much serious trouble, but I'm thinking of one time in particular. I'm not proud of it, and I'll spare you the details, but needless to say I was young and stupid at one point (now I'm just older and stupid sometimes). And as difficult as it was being in trouble...it was NOTHING compared to the anguish that I felt because I knew that I had to go home and tell my parents what I did!
- iii) I would give ANYTHING, and that MOMENT, to be able to run away from the situation and hide! I felt alone, and scared, and filled with grief and anguish. I wanted RELIEF NOW!
- iv) When we get into trouble, or when really bad things happen in our lives, we JUST... WANT... RELIEF.

- v) And this is exactly what this prayer is that's offered up from the psalmist.
"God, in YOU, I seek refuge..."
- vi) I picture a guy standing at a big door, POUNDING on the door frantically, with something or someone closing in on him, and just screaming, "Let me in God...Let me in!!!"
- vii) "Don't let me be put to shame" – spare me from this gut-wrenching experience, God! Deliver me...which means, pick me up and carry me away to safety.
- viii) He continues in verse 2 – incline your ear to me – listen to me God!
- ix) Rescue me speedily. Can't you feel the urgency in the writer's words? This isn't someone who is sort of waiting around to see what God will do with a terrible situation. This isn't someone who is patiently listening for God's next direction. This is someone banging on the door to heaven and saying, "GOD, RESCUE ME RIGHT NOW!" and I'm going to keep knocking on this door until you do.
- x) It's like, "Here's what I'm going to do – I'm going to seek you, God. And here's what you promised – you promised to deliver me. And here's what I want YOU to do God – rescue me NOW, Lord."
- xi) This is not a manipulative prayer...this isn't tricking God into doing something He doesn't want to do. This is prayer from a person, whom God loves, faithfully and urgently and trustingly asking God to be the faithful and loving God He is and giving him the deliverance that God promised. This is about taking whatever situation in which you find yourself and urgently, as a first response, beating on the doors of heaven for safety and security.
- xii) And because God is always present and ever ready to hear the prayers of His faithful people, He will open the doors and bring you into His safety and security. Whether it's sickness, or children, or death of a loved one, or an unwanted pregnancy, or loneliness, or fear, or stress, SEEK REFUGE IN THE LORD. Don't try to go it alone, because, as the psalmist writes – that will only lead to shame and more hardship.
- xiii) Cry out to God and He WILL do it!

- xiv) He WILL hear you. His safety and security are found in the refuge...in the rock...in the strong fortress that is His mercy and grace and wisdom.
- xv) We so often melt into our circumstances because we fail to run to God for help. But when we do...when we remember that God desires for us to confidently trust in His promises...then we find the security we are looking for in Him.
- xvi) Look at verse 3...it's as if the psalmist, in the midst of this fit of panic because of the situation at hand, begins to remember that God has taken care of him in the past...

b) Read verse 3-5

- i) It's true! It's always been true. You've always been there – an enduring fire, steadfast and constant – in my life. You ARE my rock and fortress.
- ii) The faith has led to trust which has led to confidence and a desire to partner with God...
- iii) And the psalmist begins to lift his face and for the sake of God's name, ask God to guide him and remove him from the net hidden for him.
- iv) Fish get caught in nets because they don't see them. And once they get caught in the knots of the net, it's almost impossible for them to get out on their own. In fact, the harder they try to escape on their own, the worse it gets – and the more tangled they become.
- v) The psalmist is using this metaphor to express his lack of power to free himself from the problems and circumstances that surround us. We may think we can, and then strive really hard to do it on our own, but we usually get tangled worse. I needed some very good people around me to help me out of the situation I was in when I was young and stupid.
- vi) I needed them to lead me through the tough waters...remove me from the trap that had been set. Don't get me wrong. I wasn't innocent here. I was swimming in net-infested waters. I was where I shouldn't have been. In your situation, where were you that had nets to trap you and no one there to guide you?

- vii) When we trust in God, from the midst of our despair and sin and disgrace, He is still faithful and will rescue us.
- viii) What a difference this is from verses 1 and 2 when there's a desperate, full-blown panic! Now, there's a confidence and trust in the Lord.
- ix) Look at verse 5 for a minute...this is an extremely familiar verse, especially during holy Week. Jesus Christ, hanging on the cross in the final moment of his life, utters these VERY SAME words as recorded in Luke 23:46. The apostle Stephen, years after that, while being stoned to death for refusing to renounce his faith in Jesus – for refusing to shut up, utters these SAME WORDS in Acts 7:59.
- x) Into your hand, I commit my spirit – the word spirit here means LIFE...into your hand, Lord, I commit my life. This isn't some weak defeat...this is the ultimate victory. Jesus and Stephen finally understood that safety and security come with complete surrender and trust in God.
- xi) And when they were saying these words, it wasn't when things were going very well for them. They didn't commit themselves totally and desperately to God's deliverance and rescue because they were happy.
- xii) They were being murdered for the sake of the name of the faithful
One who promises to be our rock and redeemer – our safety and security.
- xiii) Our response is praise to Him...jump over to verse 14..

c) Read verse 14-16

- i) I TRUST you, O Lord! You are my God!
- ii) I don't think we express our trust in the Lord enough, out loud, with our mouths. I'd like us to try this with the psalmist – repeat after me with feeling, “I trust in you, O Lord.” “You are my God”
- iii) There's just something that gets us connected with God when we actually mouth the words of devotion and praise...of trust and faith! And this is exactly what the psalmist is doing...because he feels the safety and security of trusting in the Lord alone...as God and rock and deliverer from the situation which finds him surrounded by bad things and bad people.

- iv) When safety and security is found in God and not the things and money and self-worth of jobs and relationships, we can honestly say, “I trust you, Lord.”
- v) I don’t ever want to win the lottery (which is good because I never play the lottery and if I won I’d have to just give it back). Things like lotteries and gambling are public statements saying, “I trust in something ELSE besides the Lord for my security and safety.” If we’re trying to get a windfall by chance or some silly random number, and we just happen to win, then the security we find comes from the money and not from the Lord.
- vi) The psalmist praises God by saying, “You are my God” You alone! Nothing else will take your place.
- vii) My times are in your hand...my life and my future are in your grasp...are in your control.
- viii) Deliver me, Lord...put me in the place that you want me to be and not stuck in the place that I find myself because of my actions and the actions of those around me.
- ix) This is the confident response that each and every born-again follower of Jesus Christ should have to the abiding, enduring fire of God burning in their lives – this constant presence of a faithful God who wants you to seek refuge in Him, seek wisdom and guidance from Him, seek deliverance and wholeness from Him.

3) Application

- a) I guarantee that every single one of us will at some point be faced with the kind of situation that the psalmist was faced with. If not something physical...then emotional. If not emotional, then spiritual. We will come face-to-face with the kind of attacks from the enemy and circumstances in this life that lead us to the brink of the breaking point.
- b) And it’s in those specific moments that we have a choice to make. We can swim through those net-infested waters on our own, or we can seek refuge in the Lord.
- c) And you may be tempted to go for it on your own...heck, it may have even worked in the past. Many of you are very skilled at orienting and

implementing all the tasks in your life. But let me be clear here: if you accomplish anything at all without the safety and security of the enduring fire of God's provision in your life, it is fleeting and will be merely temporary. It's like tearing off a piece of wood and jumping off a sinking ship while the rescue helicopter is hovering nearby calling out your name.

- d) Are you going to jump into the water and maybe swim to shore or are you going to grab hold of the One who is ready to pull you up?
- e) Safety and security – real security...and real safety – come only through trust in the Lord.
- f) And when that trust comes, and the rescue comes, the first response is to praise the faithful God who gives the redemption and deliverance.
- g) As I close, let me share my heart with you. My desire is that through my words and moving of the Holy Spirit, this worshipping community would continue to increasingly love gathering here to praise our faithful God.
- h) Over the next few weeks, the psalm writers will give us the material and the reminders. I will do my best to listen to the specific message from God for us and be prepared to help us enter into and be in worship.
- i) But let me ask something of you... We all have things that restrain or prevent us from fully entering into worship and praising God. A few years ago, the church was intentional about learning to be unquenchable worshippers. I love that phrase. Do me a favor: find one thing that is holding you back from that next step to being free to worship God in this place. Pray about that and ask God to release that from your experience. I honestly don't have any ulterior motives...just a desire to fall more and more in love with God and with each other in worship.
- j) If there's something I can do to help, just let me know. If you want to talk about that...my office door is open.
- k) God is an enduring fire and He is calling us to come and praise His holy name. He is faithful to provide safety and security. We must be faithful to praise Him for that, for He is worthy of our praise!
- l) Let's pray...