

THIS [Psalm 27]

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INTRODUCTION

1. Oscar Wilde, the 19th century Irish playwright wrote a line for us to chew on:
 - a. **"We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."**
 - b. The line takes place in his play *Lady Windermere's Fan*
 - 1) I wish I had the time to thoroughly explain what happens in this play.
 - 2) Briefly: Wilde confronted high society & their demented views of propriety
 - 3) Although outwardly they were moral, their hidden actions were reprehensible.
 - c. At one point in the play, two men are discussing who is truly virtuous
 - 1) The **"gutter line,"** is Wilde's way of stating quite simply that we're all lacking
 - 2) The difference, however, is where is our gaze fixed?
 - a) Are we looking up to the heavens, toward something greater than us?
 - b) Or are we mired in gutter living.
2. It's a line/concept that we need to contemplate as we consider what lies ahead.
 - a. Coming out of quarantine, how will your life be defined?
3. Today I want us to look at Psalm 27.
 - a. It's a psalm associated with the new year, but that of the Jewish calendar
 - b. This all occurs in the Hebrew month of **Elul**, a month of repentance
 - c. A 10 day period: the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah and DayOfHoliness YomKippur
 - 1) The new year is a journey towards holiness.
 - 2) To get there, you have to clear your heart and conscience.
3. THE QUESTION OF THIS TEXT: HOW DO WE DO THIS?

Psalm 27:1-3

*The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?
2 When evildoers came upon me to devour my flesh, My adversaries and my enemies, they stumbled and fell.
3 Though a host encamp against me, My heart will not fear; Though war arise against me, In spite of this I shall be confident.*

1. Psalm 27 holds a special place in the hearts of Jews for the month of Elul
 - a. Each day of the month Jews recite this psalm every morning.
 - b. But before this happens, they are to blow the shofar.
 - c. Verses 1&2 present conflict. I am threatened. I am attacked. I am vulnerable.
 - 1) I want to hone in on verse 3, because that's the shift.
 - 2) Why, in the midst of struggle, won't I fear? Because of my confidence.
2. Here, the Hebrew literally reads, **"WITH THIS . . . I SHALL BE CONFIDENT."**
 - a. The word for, "with this" is a singular Hebrew word: ב'tzot = בזאת
 - b. We bring up these words, especially in Hebrews, because of the linguistic thread.
 - 1) "WITH THIS" is rarely used in the Old Testament
 - 2) Jewish rabbis noted a connection with another instance of this word.
 - a) Upon exiting Egypt (Moses), God's people dwelled in the wilderness.
 - b) At the tabernacle with Aaron and his family were the nation's priests.
 - c) God was meticulous in telling the priests how they should conduct worship.
 - d) God did this so that the people would acknowledge his holiness.
 - 3) In **Leviticus 10:1-3**, Aaron's priest sons weren't careful. And it cost them.

"Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Moses then said to Aaron, 'This is what the LORD spoke of when he said: "'Among those who approach me I will be proved holy; in the sight of all the people. I will be honored.' Aaron remained silent."
 - 4) While it's a crazy story, the silence of Aaron speaks to the nature of the act.

- a) The priests' ultimate task where to ensure holiness, and they lost priority.
- b) This is a lesson on holiness that God's people needed to respect. Now . . .

5) On to **Leviticus 16:2,3**

"The LORD said to Moses: 'Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover. This is how Aaron is to enter the Most Holy Place . . .'"

- 6) Only one day a year was Aaron supposed to enter the Most Holy Place: Yom Kippur
 - a) Here's a rendering of the Most Holy Place, where the high priest would sacrifice
 - b) Because this was so sacred, God had a detailed list of how this would work.
 - c) So after the death of his sons, God has Aaron's undivided attention.

2. Back to the term WITH THIS. It was used in **Leviticus 16:3**

"WITH THIS . . . I SHALL BE CONFIDENT "WITH THIS . . . AARON IS TO ENTER"

- a. The Jewish rabbis saw a correlation between these two texts.
 - 1) The THIS that accompanies Aaron into the sanctuary on Yom Kippur is the THIS that supports confidence in the psalmist, even when enemies surround him.
 - 2) WITH THIS is a certain posture which with Aaron was to carry himself.

3. So the question continues to be: What is THIS?

Verses 4-6

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD And to meditate in His temple. ⁵For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; In the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock. ⁶And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me, And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD.

- 1. This is both a fascinating and confusing text.
 - a. The prayer of the song writer is to dwell in the temple forever.
 - 1) Remember that there were two different churches for God's ancient people
 - 2) At the time when this Psalm became popular, Solomon's Temple was worship.
 - 2) This was the permanent structure, giving way to place where Jesus worshipped.
 - b. But the text here speaks of the tabernacle, the tent from the desert under Moses/Aaron.
 - c. This is actually a note to the festival that immediately follows Yom Kippur. It's Sukkot.
- 2. Sukkot was the Harvest Festival for the Jews.
 - a. They lived in shelters to remember how God brought them through the wilderness.
 - b. They also did so to celebrate his providence in providing the harvest.
 - c. SO THE PSALM SHIFTS: the singer asking God to take him to the harvest.
 - d. HARVEST WAS THE TIME OF GREATEST JOY
 - 1) We fear what we cannot see, which is why New Years brings apprehension
 - 2) At harvest, you know exactly what you have and it's all before you.
 - 3) It Is Well lyric: *"Lord haste the day when my faith shall be sight . . ."*

Verses 9-14

Do not hide Your face from me, Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; Do not abandon me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation! ¹⁰For my father and my mother have forsaken me, But the LORD will take me up. Teach me Your way, O LORD, And lead me in a level path Because of my foes. ¹²Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries, For false witnesses have risen against me, And such as breathe out violence. ¹³I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living. ¹⁴Wait for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD.

- 1. In this last section, we witness two shifts in the Psalm.
 - a. The first one is in verse 9: the confidence and swagger of the poet is now gone.
 - b. Now you begin to see insecurity and fear of abandonment.
 - c. There's specificity in those "enemies" that were mentioned in verses 2,3.
 - d. False witnesses, foes, and even parents have set up against him.

- e. Here, nothing is looking promising
- 2. The second shift is the resolution, which comes quickly and abruptly
 - a. There's a quick turn in verses 13&14
 - b. Things were crazy but God ultimately won out.
 - c. Be strong, take courage, but **WAIT. WAIT. WAIT.**
 - 1) In the end, the poet is convinced that God will provide.

CONCLUSION

- 1. In order to wrap up this Psalm, we still have to figure out Verse 3
 - a. The point of the Psalm. **With THIS. But what is THIS?**
 *** **THIS** is REPENTANCE.
 - b. In the Old Testament, repentance is **RETURNING TO GOD**, the word **TESHUVAH**.
 - 1) The season of Elul is known by Jews as the season of Teshuvah
 - 2) Understand the nature of this confidence is centered in the right place.
 - a) My confidence is not in my ability to change myself
 - b) My confidence is in the Lord to honor my forgiveness
 - 3) That's one of the reasons this Psalm is recited daily over the course of a month.
- 2. Yet this psalm is unique as it flips the normal view of Teshuvah in the Old Testament.
 - a. The "normal" trajectory of biblical penitential prayer is this from complaint to confidence
 - b. Here, the trajectory is this from confidence to complaint
 - c. **HERE'S THE KEY: TRUE REPENTANCE IS THE DECONSTRUCTION OF YOUR CONFIDENCE.**
 - d. For you to get right with God, you need to melt into him.
- 3. Coming back to the Oscar Wilde saying actually summarizes this conundrum.
 - a. "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars."
 - b. Perhaps Paul expressed it just as well in **Romans 3:10**: "there is no one righteous, not one."
 - c. Our lives are less defined by who we are and more on where our eyes are fixed.
 - d. It nests in the person and act of Christ Jesus.