May the Lord’s face shine upon you!

*When the prophets, Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them, then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak arose and began to rebuild the house of God which is in Jerusalem; and the prophets of God were with them supporting them.*

 Ezra 5:1-2

How marvelous it was in this particular case, that the people of Israel listened to the prophets God sent to them. So many times in Israel’s history, the prophets were ignored or worse. Here, those who returned from 70 years of captivity in Babylon, were released to come back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. They had faithfully begun the work, but outside influences had brought progress to a stand-still.

Now the Lord raised up two prophets to encourage the people to go back to work, trusting in the Lord to deal with those who were opposed to them. Both the governor and the priest, the political and spiritual leaders, answered the call of the prophets and roused the people to action. More opposition came, but they trusted in the Lord and pursued the work He had called them to do.

What a lesson for us! We may not have prophets to speak directly to us, but we have the Bible; God’s unfailing word. In the same way as the people of Jerusalem, we have work we are called to do. We are called to this work in spite of obstacles and opposition. We are to work and rely on the Lord for results.

The small remnant in Jerusalem listened to the word of God and prospered. Let us do the same. We have the word of God and if we follow it, we will bring glory to God and build up His people. Thanks be to God.

In Christ’s love

John

 01-29-23

Psalm 139:7-12

Psalm 139 is a beautiful hymn of praise to God; proclaiming His complete knowledge of each of us and His existence in every part of His creation. It is also a prayer for God to lead the way in cleansing us from sin. Although this Psalm was a prayer of David, it is certainly one that each of us can pray and claim for our own.

The verses we are looking at focus on God’s omnipresence; He is everywhere in His creation. One note of caution with God’s omnipresence is that we need to avoid what is called “pantheism”. Pantheism says that God *is* everything. All the rocks and trees, the earth itself, all living beings are part of God Himself. No, all these things are His creation, not part of Him. God exists everywhere but is separate from and far above all He has made.

These verses are an amazing comfort to those who have submitted themselves to God and are His people. They are terrifying to those who reject God and wish to go their own way; following their own sinful nature. We who are Christians realize how ridiculous it is to try to run away from the all-powerful God of the Bible. But those who try such things are blinded by their sin and don’t see the foolishness of what they do. But always bear in mind that each of us was the same before we came to Christ.

Several years ago, I took my young grandson to a playground in Keyser. We had a good time as he played on the equipment. The playground was surrounded by a chain-link fence and at one place there was a road leading in that had a gate, and the gate was closed. At some point, my grandson ran to the gate and crawled under it and took off running down the road into a section of Keyser. I called for him and told him to come back. I can still remember the look on his face as he looked back over his shoulder with a big grin and kept on running. Grandpa was on the other side of the fence and he was gleeful in running away, believing he had freedom.

I think of that as a picture of what so many do regarding God. Even as God calls to them, telling them to come to Him, they run away and grin mockingly, doing exactly what they want to do. They don’t know that God knows best, loves them, and wants to provide for them. They don’t know what danger they are heading for and that only God can save them from it.

My grandson was running as hard as he could toward the heart of Keyser. He didn’t comprehend the traffic he was heading toward; nor the number of people, some of whom might hurt him; he was oblivious to New Creek, right beside him where he might fall in.

In his bid for freedom, he didn’t realize that granddad could also get under the gate, could outrun him, had no qualms about warming his bottom, and could tightly hold his hand bringing him back to the playground.

As our Psalm points out, there is no running from God, He is already everywhere. Running from Him is not only pointless, but it’s foolish: He is the One who provides for us and is the way to eternal life; He is the only One who can keep us perfectly safe in the best way possible. He can also catch us and provide the necessary discipline. And He will do that. He will afflict non-believers in order to try to bring them to Him. He will also discipline believers when we stray; and that is because of His love for us. As we read in Hebrews 12:11, “*All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*”

Now, in my little illustration involving my grandson, I don’t mean to put myself in the place of God; that would be absurd. But I thought his behavior was so typical of human behavior in dealing with God; Turning from Him to go our own way, thinking the whole time we are getting by with something. Yet God calls to us; and if we wonder off in the wrong direction, He will come to get us if we are His. When He comes to get us, it may not be pleasant; but it will be for our eternal benefit.

Verse 7 asks, “*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?*” The “Spirit” in your bible may or may not be capitalized. But it works either way. Certainly, the Holy Spirit is the spirit of God and as part of the Triune God, He is omnipresent. However, as we are told in John 4:24, “*God is spirit.*” So, the triune God exists as spirit; He does not have a physical form as we do. Because of this He does not have physical limitations. He can be all places at once.

It's important to keep in mind that God is the only unlimited spirit. God has also made spiritual beings in addition to physical ones. The created spiritual beings are the angels; both those who have remained faithful to God and those who have followed satan in rebellion. But these created beings are limited. They cannot be everywhere at once and their knowledge is limited. This includes satan. He can only be in one place at a time and he can’t read your mind. Only God is infinite and unlimited.

David goes on in this Psalm to expand on how impossible it is to avoid the presence of God. He speaks in terms of physical places and things; however, with the coming of Jesus, they take on a deeper spiritual meaning. This is just another indication that Scripture is inspired by God and is actually His word.

“*If I ascend to heaven, You are there.*” A person can go as high and as far away from the earth as they are able, and still God is already there. Even in the imagination, to travel to the farthest points of the universe, or even into the spiritual realm, God is present in all these places: Right beside the stars, in all the space between the galaxies, enthroned in the third heaven.

While none of these places offers escape for the sinner, ascending to heaven now becomes a reality and an hope for the believer. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. When our body tastes death, that will not be the end. Our spirit which has been made alive in Christ will travel to the place of God’s throne, and we will be fully aware of His presence and glory forevermore.

“*If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.*” Very basically, Sheol is the grave, or the place of the dead. In Scripture, Sheol is pictured in several different ways: as a great cavern for the dead (Ezekiel 32:18-32); a stronghold with gates (Psalm 9:13); even a dark place that is a wasteland (Job 10:22); and also a devouring beast (Isaiah 5:14). Making one’s bed in Sheol refers to dying.

Our Psalm says the God is even present in this place of the dead. Proverbs 15:11 tells us the same thing: ‘*Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord*.” Some translations of the Bible use “hell” instead of “Sheol”, and this works too. We don’t tend to think of God’s presence in hell, but He is completely omnipresent. Hell is the place of His righteous wrath and He sees it poured out on His enemies. Although He is there, the souls in hell do not have the comfort of His saving presence.

Again, with the coming of Christ, we gain a new perspective on Sheol. In Luke 16 we hear Jesus’ account of the rich man and Lazarus. Both die and both end up in Sheol; the place of the dead. But we also learn that Sheol has two compartments; one is a place of suffering and the other is a place of comfort.

Those in the place of comfort are the Old Testament saints who are simply waiting for the redemption that Jesus will bring by His work on the cross. This is where the soul of Jesus went for the time that His body was in the tomb. Next was the fulfillment of the prophecy given in Psalm 68:18, “*You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives.*” Although the dead saints were in paradise, they were still not in the glorious presence of the Lord. Jesus led them into heaven where they could see God’s glory.

So it is now for the saints, when we die our bodies may go to Sheol or to the grave, but our spirits go to be with our Lord. What a difference: God is present in hell, but the occupants have no knowledge of His presence; we who die in Christ will immediately be in the presence of God, joyously in the brightness of His glory.

The wings of the dawn gives the idea of the speed of light and of the breadth of the light piercing the sky when the sun rises. Even light cannot outrun God; from one edge of the sky to the other is not too far for Him. Picture how suddenly the light of the dawn shines as the sun rises over the horizon. Especially if there are a few clouds to catch the rays. One moment there is nothing; the next, light is there. God is faster, but He is already there anyway.

There is life in the bottom of the sea; living creatures thrive at the bottom of the Mariana Trench. God is the author of all life and He is there sustaining His creatures. It is a comfort to the followers of Jesus, that no matter how fast we fly or how deep we might even go in the ocean, God is there.

Sometimes our life moves too fast and we feel spread way too thin. Sometimes we feel as if we are drowning, overwhelmed by everything going on in our life. These are the times we try to be still and cling to God through Jesus Christ. It doesn’t matter if we feel like God is far away; He is not; He is right here with us. This is where our faith is sometimes tested, our belief that the Bible is true. How blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

God definitely has a presence throughout all the physical and spiritual world. But omnipresence also means that He is with us, personally, in whatever we are going through. Again, what comfort this is for the Christian. When we pass that test of faith by not turning away in times of difficulty, we bring glory to God and learn perseverance for ourselves.

God’s right hand will lay hold of us. Nothing is beyond His reach. For those who run from God, thinking that they can hide from Him, God’s right hand will become for them a horrible reality. As Hebrews 10:31 tells us, “*It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God”.* There is no one who can rescue you from the hand of God or from the wrath of God, once you reject Jesus Christ.

Our Psalm makes clear, that no darkness is dark enough to hide us from God. Sometimes evil deeds are done in the dark so that no one will see them. But these are not hidden from God. Furthermore, these evil deeds will be made known. God will shine light upon them and each person’s shame will be made known.

On the other hand are the believers in Christ. These also are in the hand of almighty God. But there is no terror here. God’s hand is a place of protection, it is the place we want to be. And just as no one can rescue the accursed from the hand of God, no one can snatch the believer from His hand either. In Christ, we are eternally safe; and no amount of darkness, either physical or spiritual, will separate us from our omnipresent God.

Prayer

First, we give You thanks, Lord God; You and You alone have provided salvation for us in Your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus promised to be with us even until the end of the age. We know that Your Holy Spirit is always present in us; that we are sealed with Him. In Jesus, we are now Your children; and how blessed we are to have You as our Father.

Please forgive us, for even in the face of all these blessings, our flesh draws us away from You; it wants to try to hide from You even though such is futile. Remember that we are but dust and have patience with us. Show us our sin O Lord, and give us the strength to resist it. Help us to desire to stand in the light of Your presence and turn our backs on darkness.

May Your Holy Spirit ever remind us of His dwelling within us. May His guiding light shine in our lives so that we can know the closeness of our Lord. Help us to remember that You are a very present help in time of trouble; both physical and spiritual. May we turn to You first in all things. For You are God, and there is no other.

In Jesus’ name

Amen