

One of my favourite professors in Seminary taught me that churches that grow
tend to be churches that talk about Jesus.

When I began preaching - as a lay preacher, in my early 20's -
I can tell you I talked about God a lot.

It was easy to talk about God -

God is big, and mysterious, and sort of "somewhere out there."
God can be kept at arm's length.

But Jesus - well, Jesus is personal.
He's human.

He walked this earth, and you can go to the places where he was.
He had friends, and he met people in their homes.
He experienced life in this world...
with all of its heartaches and hopefulness,
all of its frailties and triumphs.

Jesus gets up close,
and when he gets up close, he changes everything.
I believe that it's impossible to meet Jesus in a personal way,
and remain unchanged.

And change is hard!
So I liked talking about God when I began preaching,
because God demanded less of me,
God accepted me just as was,
and I didn't really have to go through the difficulty of change.

But I guess I must have grown up a bit somewhere along the way,
because now I'm drawn to talking about Jesus,
to learning what I need to know in order to become more like him,
to make the changes that Jesus demands of me,
as he recreates me in His image.

And it's not that change has suddenly become easy,
but it has become GOOD.

I'm reminded of this wonderful conversation
in *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* by CS Lewis.
In the land of Narnia, human children Lucy and Susan are
speaking with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver.
The Beavers are telling them about Aslan who is on the move,
who is returning to the land he created,
who will break the curse of the White Witch,
that has plunged the land
into eternal winter.

The conversation goes like this:

Is he a man?" asked Lucy.

Aslan a man!" said Mr Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is King of the wood and the son of the great emperor-beyond- the-sea. Don t you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion – the Lion, the great lion."

ooh!" said Susan, I d thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

That you will, dearie, and no mistake" said Mrs Beaver; if there s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they re either braver than most or else just silly."

Then he isn t safe?" said Lucy.

Safe?" said Mr Beaver; don t you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn t safe. But he s good. He s the King, I tell you."

No, Jesus isn't safe, but he is good.

And knowing him WILL change you - but it will be for the better.

So yes, I love to talk about Jesus now.

And that tends to have me leaning toward the New Testament,

when it comes to sermonizing,

because the New Testament

reveals his life, death and resurrection in no uncertain terms.

The danger, dear friends, is that we might get the idea that Old Testament is - well, old.

Passé.

Unimportant.

To be forgotten.

To be ignored.

And that IS dangerous, because the Old Testament is part of our story.

And anytime we forget part of our story,

we forget part of who we are, part of who God is,

part of what it means to be children of the King,

part of how Jesus has been revealed to us,

and part of how and why we need him.

You see, people tend to think that God is different in the Old Testament and the New:

That the God of the Old Testament was angry and spiteful and mean;

That the God of the New Testament is meek and mild, beseeching and inviting.

But God is God.

Whether Father, Son or Spirit,

God cannot change God's essence.

God - as the Bible tells us -

is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

So why does there seem to be this difference between the two testaments?

Well, I like what one preacher I admire says -
that it's not God that changed, but humanity.

That humanity as a race needed to grow up a bit,
before God could come in human form to beseech and invite.

Think of being a parent -
when your child is 2 years old, there are very firm rules,
and very clear consequences for breaking the rules.
When your child is in their teenage years,
there are still firm rules and firm consequences,
but there is greater room for discussion and compromise.

And when your child reaches adulthood - hopefully, ideally -
the rules that they have had up until that point,
and the consequences they have experienced,
has made them capable of deciding their own rules -
of managing their own lives.

At this point, if all goes well, the parent is still highly involved in the child's life -
but they are no longer the enforcer,
they are an advice giver, a counsellor, an example,
and hopefully an inspiration.

The role of the parent changes as the child grows and matures and learns.
It's the same with God and humanity.
God's role changed as humanity matured and advanced.

God is still God throughout the Bible.
Beginning to finish, God's essence doesn't change.
God is the same - yesterday, today and tomorrow.

But we have changed, and God interacts with us differently.
Sending his Son who walks among us, heals us, teaches us, lays down his life for us,
and then returns to the Father,
gifting us with the Spirit to advocate for us
and to empower our faith as we move forward,
becoming the church -
the hands and feet of Christ
reaching out to the world.

You may be wondering if I'm ever going to get to the Psalm that is our focus for today.
I promise you - it's coming.

But I wanted to lay all of this foundation first,
because in this series, as we have read through some of the Psalms,

we've been finding Jesus in the Old Testament,
we've been seeing that the Spirit is at work in the Old Testament,
That God is the same yesterday, today, tomorrow and forever,
in the Bible - beginning to finish.

In Psalm 27, we see David - who is the author of many of the Psalms, including this one -
struggling with a difficult time in his life.

From the accounts in First and Second Samuel, First Kings and First Chronicles,
as well as some of the Psalms that David authored,
we know that David had enemies,
we know that he lived in exile in the hills for a time,
we know that he fought battles and wars as a King.

There were many difficult times in David's life -
some of which he completely brought upon himself through bad choices.

We don't know which difficult time, specifically,
David is dealing with in this Psalm,
but it's clear from what he writes that he is feeling the pressure
of enemies surrounding him.

He writes:

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

Which sounds like a great statement of faith - and it is -
but you only write such things when you are in trouble.
You only need a reminder of the light when you are in the dark.

I can tell you from my own experience - in the most troubling times in my life,
I would come up with an affirmation, and I would repeat it to myself a few times a day,
because that would help me get through the day.

I can remember saying to myself:

*God has promised you a better day.
That day is coming. It is not here yet, but it is coming.
God's promises do not fail.*

I would say this out loud to myself two or three times a day -
because I was in the dark,
I was in the bad days,
and telling myself that God had promised a better day gave me hope,
gave me strength, gave me peace -
gave me what I needed
to make it through another day,
and another, and another.

Until one day, I recognized that the better days had come.
And I thanked God for keeping his promise.

That is the kind of thing that David is saying here -
an affirmation of God's strength, and light and salvation,
for a dark and troubling time.

A few verses later, David writes:

⁹ Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.

Do not reject me or forsake me,
O God my Saviour.

¹⁰ Though my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will receive me.

I see his turmoil in these verses - just a few verses before he begins with affirmation,
and now he is begging God not to turn away from him,
not to reject him.

That's what turbulent times in life are like.
You can say the affirmation over and over,
but still feel the desperation and despair of your situation.

You know the affirmation is true,
but still feel the need to beg God for his presence.

I find David so very relatable in this Psalm.
And that's one of the things I love about the Psalms -
they are very raw, very real, very relatable.

They remind us that the struggles we face,
the way our emotions are turbulent and sometimes contradictory,
the way our faith can be strong and weak at the same time -
these are all the things that people of faith
have always experienced.

This is how human life is - full of twist and turns, full of difficulties and desperation.

Full of moments when we wonder how we will go on.
It's normal to feel like a total mess.
And to feel like the world is a total mess.

But the good news is this - David calls God "Saviour" and "Salvation."
The root of those words in Hebrew is the same as the root of "Yeshua."
Which gets translated into the Greek as "Jesus"
Which becomes, in English, Jesus.

When you see the word Saviour or Salvation connected to God in the Old Testament,
you would not be wrong to say a quiet, "Hello, Jesus."

Salvation has always been God's plan.

From the moment that Sin entered the world,

Yeshua, God the Saviour, Jesus, the lion who is good though not safe,
has been on the move.

And though it took many centuries before the world was ready to receive him,

He was there, steadfast, strong and true - from the very beginning.

And Yeshua has always been about transformation.

There's a song I love that includes the chorus:

You make beautiful things, you make beautiful things out of the dust.

You make beautiful things, you make beautiful things out of us.

Out of the mess of David's life,

Yeshua makes some thing so beautiful that David will be remembered
as the best King Israel ever knew.

When you go to Israel

you visit the City of David in Jerusalem.

It is the palace from which David ruled in his day.

He is remembered well, and still held up as a pillar of Israel's long history.

Jesus is making beautiful things out of your life -

even when it looks like a mess.

Jesus is making beautiful things out of my life -

even when I feel small or insignificant, even when I doubt,
even when I am in the dark.

I want you to know that.

As David writes:

¹³ I am still confident of this:

I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;

be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord.

Let us pray.