

## **"God's Promises"**

**Pastor Dave Carlson  
First Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, November 4, 2012**

**Old Testament Lesson - Psalm 112:1-9  
New Testament Lesson - Matthew 6:26-30a**

Doug Sterner of Alexandria, Virginia, runs a website called HomeOfHeroes.com, which provides a listing of Medal of Honor recipients. Sterner is very careful in compiling the list, particularly after one incident. When examining a certain Navy Cross citations, Sterner realized something was fishy. It used the right font and the right seal and was even signed by the Secretary of the Navy, but it said the president "takes pride" in presenting the prize. Well, Sterner knew that "pride" is normally used only when the recipient is dead. And this recipient was alive. Sterner knew he had found a faker. Turns out, the imposter had been bragging of his heroism for years – and even loaned his awards to a veteran's museum for display. Eventually, the man with the fake citation admitted he never served in Vietnam, never earned the Navy Cross, never saw combat and, in fact, never was a Marine.

"This was just a stupid, immature thing that took on a life of its own," he said. "Then it becomes a question of ego, and you don't want to admit you screwed everyone, so you keep the lie going."

This pretender blamed it on immaturity and ego. But it's also likely his behavior was caused by fear, unhappiness and a sense of not being enough just the way he was.

In Psalm 112, we read, "Happy are those who fear the Lord, who greatly delight in his commandments." Had the Marine imposter read and understood what the psalmist tells us here, he never would have faked a Medal of Honor citation. Because in the Scriptures, we learn of God's promises to give us more than a citation of honor. God promises us the foundation of honor – that which actually brings honor to God's people.

In Psalm 112, we read of God's promises, that "their descendants will be mighty in the land," "wealth and riches are in their houses," and that God's people will be blessed as "the generation of the upright." Who doesn't want that? Who doesn't want a long line of descendants – particularly as we get older and face our own mortality? And what about wealth and riches and blessings – duh – that's a no-brainer. What other things do we want in life? Raise your hand, shout them out:

Sure, we all want those or similar things in life. So how do we get them? Well, according to Holy Scripture here, we get them by fearing the Lord

AND delighting in his commandments. That's what we'll look at this morning; what is it to fear the Lord and delight in his commandments. When the psalmist says "happy are those who fear the Lord," he's not talking about the type of fear you and I think of. Fear as the psalmist thinks of it is a recognition of God's awesome power. It's what leads us to entrust our life and our future to God's care. Any wealth or riches or status or longevity that we may enjoy, it all comes from God. And there's nothing we can do in and of ourselves – nothing we can do apart from God, distanced from God – nothing we can do to attain any more wealth or riches or status or longevity. These things and all of life's blessings – these blessings that you mentioned such as ... – all of life's blessings come when we align our desires to God's purpose.

A doting mother sent the following note to her son's teacher: "Dear Teacher: If my Archibald is naughty – and he sometimes is – just whip the boy next to him; this will frighten Archibald and make him behave." Happy are those who fear the Lord, but not because of some punishment they might get, but because of the awesome realization that they owe everything to God – all that we are, all that we have, and all that we will ever be. Happy are those who fear the Lord.

AND happy are those who delight in God's commandments. To delight in God's commandments means we follow God's teachings and instructions when it comes to how we live our lives again, not out of a sense of fear but because of a sense of faith in God's love for us as God's beloved children.

Of course, the problem for us is, we don't always return to what God teaches us when life gets a little rough, or even a lot rough. We don't always if ever actually turn to what God's word, the things that God says to guide and protect God's people. More often when we get overwhelmed or down or put upon or fed up, more often we turn to our favorite distractions rather than God's divine instructions.

One writer put it this way: "We should not artificially turn away from our (worries) by constantly listening to the radio, for example, or running to the movies, or some other kind of busywork, but rather, (we should) direct our cares to him who wills to bear and share all our sin and all our suffering and therefore all our cares. No diversion, "but (rather) directing our cares (to God). This is what to do." The writer, Helmut Thielicke, continues, "Jesus did not say: Look at the ostrich, how it buries its head in the desert sand and so tries to escape the fear of danger. No, he said: Look at the birds of the air, keep your eyes open, stand up straight and look to the heights where God makes known his grace and care."

So, when life deals us dirt, when hard times hit or we find ourselves struggling with important decisions or stuck at a turning point in our lives, the psalmist would have us turn to God and God's word. And what does

God teach us through Holy Scripture about true happiness and living a life in line with God's purpose? In Psalm 112, God gives us a list of attributes that reflect God's expectations of us.

"They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright," says the psalmist. This means that those who follow God's instructions for true happiness become a beacon of light in the darkness for others who are seeking God – they set an example for others to follow.

And do we? As Christians, would others look at your life – at my life – and see that God is up to something? Not sure. Well, let's continue with our list of attributes found in our Psalm.

God's people are gracious, merciful, and righteous," they "deal generously and lend" to those in need and "conduct their affairs with justice," they "distribute freely," and "give to the poor," "their hearts are steady," and "they will not be afraid," and "they will never be moved" or compromised when it comes to their beliefs, practices and way of life as followers of the Lord. Happy are those who delight in God's commandments.

So, now we know God's expectations for us – that we would be God-fearing people, God-trusting people who delight in God's commandments or teachings or instructions. People who appreciate God's awesome power and trust in it, because they know how much God loves those who love and serve the Lord. And we know what we should be doing as such people – being gracious, merciful, just, and giving; distributing freely that which was so graciously given to us by our Creator.

But what does all that get us? We know that it's not actually material wealth and riches or a trouble-free life and perfect health, so what can we expect of our lives if we do continually seek to know and follow God's instructions in life, trusting the outcome to God? What's payoff of all this?

The Psalmist says this of God's faithful people, "their righteousness endures forever" and "they will be remembered forever;" "they will look in triumph on their foes" and they will be "exalted in honor." Here, God speaks of our legacy as children of God – a tradition of right living that will outlive us. And there's the assurance that we will be remembered forever, which of course we won't. Countless saints of the church – and if you're a church member in Christ you're a saint of the church – countless saints of the church down through history are long gone and forgotten. No one remembers them all. No one, except God.

In the eternity of God's being, God remembers all God's children – living, dead, and those yet to be. We all have a place in God's heart.

And in the end, as children of God, we are exalted in honor as we look in triumph over our foes, over those things that would oppose God's will and thus our very being as children of God.

But this is not honor for our sake or in our behalf, but for God's sake and in God's behalf. If we have truly aligned ourselves to God's purpose in life, then any success we enjoy belongs not to us, but to God. And any triumph that is achieved is achieved not by us, but by God, God working through us, sometimes; and God working in spite of us at other times. But either way, God's will will be done. Our only choice is are we going to be active participants and beneficiaries of God's will, or will we sit on the sidelines, or maybe even run interference or block God's will? Will we allow God to work and shine through our lives?

That's our choice. God lets us choose whether or not we will trust in the Lord and follow his teachings. And if we so choose, God promises us an eternal happiness – a happiness that cannot be dashed or dampened by anything we may come up against in life. It's a happiness deeper and stronger than our day-to-day joy or laughter or contentment. The happiness of those who trust in the Lord and follow his teachings resides in our heart of hearts. It's always available to us if we look for it. And in this place of divine happiness, nothing can ever truly overwhelm us, even though it may feel like that sometimes. Because as God's children, our strength and our trust in the Lord.

Regardless of what you or I may be feeling at any one moment, we can always seek out and return to this sense of inner happiness and contentment, knowing that as a precious child of God, we will never be forsaken or abandoned, and that in the fullness of time, God will raise us up in triumph over all that opposes God's will. Let us take heart in that, and move forward , confident in God's awesome power and love. Amen

## **PASTORAL PRAYER**

**Ever present God, everything is still in your hands. Out of eternity you have called each one of us into your Church. By the spirit of prophecy you have awakened our souls to the possibility and expectancy of renewal and hope. By a most strange choosing it is we you have named to redeem the world by faith in you.**

**And it is in faith that we find our rest, knowing that when all seems out of control, you are still God of the universe. When life seems chaotic, we find order in you. When evil appears to have the upper hand, your goodness is not threatened. When violence shakes the foundation of our lives, you come in peace.**

**Lord, give us patience, faith and hope. Give us eyes to see beyond the real to the "really real" – those ways in which you never stop working for the redemption of our world.**

**Redeem now those situations that are beyond our touch – global poverty, incurable disease and illness, lives that seem out of control. Show us, O Lord, how to go on and move forward in faith.**

**And help us, Lord, to continue where we can your ministry of incarnation, a ministry brought to earth and planted in our hearts by your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but  
deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.  
Amen.**