

January 29, 2017

What We Can Know

**READ:** Psalm 27:3 (Common English Bible)

*“If an army camps against me, my heart won’t be afraid. If war comes up against me, I will continue to trust in this.”*

**MEDITATE:**

For some, the greatest struggle of faith is uncertainty. One man spoke to me following worship recently and commented, “I find this Jesus you speak of very attractive. And I have no doubt that living as Jesus taught will positively impact a life. My difficulty is this, what can we know for sure?” The writer of these words in Psalm 27 records an ancient answer to this question that remains very present for some people: “What can we know for sure?” Here, the author makes an honest assessment of the world – a world that is fearful of hostile armies and of war – and affirms that, nonetheless, trust in God will abound. Anyone would be grateful that this author is so confident in the presence and power of almighty God. Yet, the question remains, “How shall we find that same confidence?”

Gene E. Bartlett is helpful.<sup>i</sup> First is the consistent witness that God is a loving God. Naturally, this unwavering witness through the ages fails to prove to existence of God. Simply, it asserts agreement that if there is a God, that God is a loving God. Yet, an honest and fair reading of the Bible demands some attention to the cultural norms that shaped the day when these words were written. In the day of scripture the notion of “father” was much deeper and richer than our present use of the designation. More than a biological identification, “father” was one who had authority and commanded respect. Unquestioning obedience and honor was expected. So when Jesus addressed God as “Father,” Jesus was making a theological claim – obedience was expected before proof was received. And throughout the ages, as men and women struggled imperfectly to obey God, the consistent experience was love, acceptance and forgiveness. A common experience through thousands of years of struggling to live faithfully does, at the minimum, hint at the possibility of God’s existence.

Second is the conviction that men and women are responsible creatures. We may shirk responsibility at various times in our lives but none of can escape the conviction that, ultimately, we are personally responsible for the direction our lives will take. We have the capacity to decide to move in one direction or another, to love or to withhold love. Each person senses a freedom to make decisions that will impact their lives positively or negatively. Except in those cases where there exist some mental deficiently or handicap, the common experience is that there is a tug in those decisions to move positively for the benefit of others and oneself. From where does that tug come; the tug toward kindness, goodness and mercy?

Third is the common experience that good is more powerful than evil. So pervasive is this thought that it is woven throughout the pages of science fiction. Look at the popular movie franchise, *Star Wars*. Anyone familiar with it have had the words, “May the force be with you” engraved upon their minds – “the force” a force for good. Bartlett observes on this one point that in the long sweep of history, there is evidence after evidence that good beats evil at every turn. How is that so? For Gene Bartlett and countless Christians, the answer cannot be coincidence. Behind the consistent witness of being deeply loved, behind every conviction of personal responsibility and behind every experience that good is a greater force than evil is the notion that present is a common source. For many millions of people through the pages of scripture to the present day, that source is God. “What can we know for sure?” The answer is these three things. And they all point to something much deeper.

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<sup>i</sup> Gene E. Bartlett, “Some Things We Know Without Proof,” **The News in Religion and Other Sermons** (New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947), 96ff.

