

Christ our refuge

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[0 : 0 0] You know, a while back, I heard a story of an absolutely insane, disastrous, bureaucratic blunder that literally put hundreds of lives in jeopardy.

! It was an incident in Florida when one of those huge hurricanes hit. I think it was Hurricane Hugo or something like that. But in any case, a particular inland school was designated as a storm shelter. And when the hurricane hit, literally hundreds of people filled the building.

The building I can imagine, not unlike this building right here, imagine hundreds of people packed in here looking for shelter from the storm. But somehow, years earlier, when that building was designated as a storm shelter, it was somehow overlooked that the building was lying in a flood plain.

So, when the storm came, the surge of water came and the building was flooded. Now, imagine the scene. Hundreds of people crowded into a large room with no power in the middle of the night with 100 mile an hour winds outside.

And then the water comes in. And at first it was only a foot. And then it kept rising and it was three feet. And then, as the water kept rising, panic began to set in among the crowd. And for literally hours, hundreds of people were crouched on tables and standing in water up to five feet deep with their kids on their shoulders as the storm raged outside.

[1 : 3 0] It's a miracle that no lives were lost. But as you can imagine, after the storm was over, there was a huge uproar because people almost lost their lives being directed to an unsafe storm shelter.

You know, it makes me think of a spiritual parallel. I mean, just as there are physical storms that we may have to endure, you know, there are spiritual storms as well. Times when we may suffer to one degree or another, sometimes through no fault of our own.

My question for you today is how does your faith hold up in times like that? Is God your refuge? Is he your storm shelter, as it were? Your sanctuary that you can run to when things get tough?

Is he your hiding place, your strength, your anchor, that one unmovable constant that you can surely have faith in? If not, he should be. Because throughout scripture we see God presenting himself as a strong refuge for his people. And that's what we have here in Psalm 27.

You see, God is David's help in time of need. When things are going bad, when his life is falling apart, he knows that he can run to God and he will find in God shelter from the turmoil and hardship.

[2 : 4 5] And that brings us to our proposition statement. All right, so Dr. Carter, what's the sermon about? What's the sermon about? Well, here it is in a single sentence. Trust God. Trust God to see you through the storms of life.

Because he is your strong refuge. That's what Psalms 27 is about in a nutshell. And let's unpack it and you'll see where I get that from here in the text.

The first thing I want you to observe about this passage is David's unshakable confidence in the Lord. You see, David understood that God was his refuge in time of storm.

And so when the battles raged all around him, he stood confident knowing that God was going to protect him. Now, I want to go back and look at the text and we'll look at verses one to six again. And I want you to notice David's confidence here in these verses, beginning with verse one.

The Lord is my light and my salvation, so why should I be afraid? The Lord is my fortress protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble? When evil people come to devour me, when my enemies and foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.

[3 : 50] Though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if I am attacked, I will remain confident. The one thing I ask of the Lord, the thing that I seek most is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

Delighting in the Lord's perfections and meditating in his temple. For he will conceal me there when troubles come. He will hide me in his sanctuary. He will place me out of reach on a high rock.

Then I will hold my head high above my enemies who surround me at his sanctuary. I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy and sing and praising the Lord with music. So what do you see here?

You see David confident in his status before God. He knows he's a child of God. He knows that God is going to protect him. Notice his confidence here. Now let's take these verses and put them into their historical context a little bit.

As you may know, this psalm was written fairly late in David's career. A scriptural parallel would be somewhere in the latter half of the book of 2 Samuel. You see when David wrote this psalm, things were not going very well for him in his life.

[4 : 55] As you might recall, as a result of David's sins, Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan confronted the king in 2 Samuel 12 and pronounced upon him the stiff penalty that he would pay for his murderous adultery.

Let's actually, let's take a look at that briefly. If you flip over to 2 Samuel chapter 12, you'll see the prophet Nathan confronting David and we see the consequences that he's going to have to pay in his life.

Picking up in verse 7 of 2 Samuel 12. Then Nathan said to David, You are that man. The Lord, the God of Israel says, I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul.

I gave you your master's house and his wives and the kingdom of Israel and Judah. If that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more. Why then have you despised the word of the Lord and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and stolen his wife.

From this time on, your family will live by the sword because you have despised me by taking the wife of Uriah to be your own. This is what the Lord says. Because of what you have done, I will cause your own household to rebel against you.

[6 : 02] I will give your wives to another man before your very eyes and he will go to bed with them in public view. You did it secretly, but I will make this happen to you openly in the sight of all Israel. So we see David here under the sanction of the Lord because of his terrible sin there.

That he was going to reap hardship and adversity because of this sin. That turmoil and trouble and violence would follow him all the days of his life.

That his own sons would rise up in rebellion against him. And of course, if you follow the story in 2 Samuel, you see exactly how all these things came to pass. Wars from without, rebellion and insurrection from within, cunning, deceit, treachery even in his own household.

You have the regrettable incident between David's children, Amnon and Tamar, and Absalom's revenge and his ultimate rebellion against his father. It's a fascinating story. It's a real Netflix special if they ever make a movie out of it.

It would be fascinating to watch. But if these stories don't ring a bell with you, then I commend the story of 2 Samuel to you again. But the point is that David's latter life was not a life of ease and plenty.

[7 : 15] No, he had it hard. He suffered. Tragedy followed him wherever he went. But even in the middle of all that turmoil and trouble and drama and chaos and strife, David knew that he could look to God.

Now I want you to read Psalm 27 in that light again. And I want you to see how David knew that he could look to God for deliverance. Again, look at verse 1. Despite his troubles, David's focus is not on the chaos around him, but his focus is heavenward.

The Lord is my light and my salvation. Look at where David's treasure is. It's not in his earthly kingship. I mean, look at verse 4. In verse 4 he says, The one thing I ask of the Lord, the thing I seek most, is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

Delighting in the Lord's perfections and meditating in his temple. My goodness, his heart is set after the things of God. I mean, he's a king. But he really sounds like he wants to be a priest there, doesn't he?

He just wants to spend his time in the Lord's presence and set all these earthly troubles aside and focus on the majesty of God. Minister to the Lord in his tabernacle. I want you to see David's confidence in these verses.

[8 : 20] And his strong conviction that when he cries out to God, that God is going to hear him. And that God is going to answer him. Yes, he was under God's sanction.

These things were happening to him because of his sin. Yet he knew that God had not rejected him. That God had made promises to him that God fully intended to keep. And so David knew that he was still a child of God in spite of suffering the temporal consequences of his sin.

David knew, verse 2, that his faith is going to see him victorious over all his enemies. Verse 6 says essentially the same thing. You see, David is convinced that no matter what this fallen world might throw at him, he's going to be safe.

Because God is his refuge. Again, verse 3, though a mighty army surrounds me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if I am attacked, I will remain confident. Verse 5, for he will conceal me there when troubles come.

He will hide me in his sanctuary. He will place me out of reach on a high rock. You see, David knows that God is going to protect him. That God's going to keep him safe. Now, he's a realist.

[9 : 26] He doesn't deny the hardships that are facing him, but he trusts God to see him through. He knows that the answer is not just to bury his head in the sand and pretend like those problems aren't there.

He's not saying, oh, don't worry. Be happy. Everything's going to be okay. That's not what he's saying. He realizes he has enemies. There are bad people out there who want to do him harm.

Verse 3. He realizes he may have to go through some battles, but he's confident that the Lord is going to protect him. He knows that he can look to God. He can bring his petitions to the Lord and that the Lord will always answer him.

That God is going to spare him. That God will make a way where there seems to be no way. And so David resolves just to praise God anyway. He's going to worship the Lord. He's going to trust him no matter what happens.

Look at the latter half of verse 6. You see, David realized that he could put his trust and confidence in God because God is a strong refuge for his people.

[10 : 25] You know, it makes me think of that incident with Joshua and Caleb and the Hebrew spies. I know you know the story. Numbers 13. Moses sent the spies into the land of Canaan in order to do some reconnaissance before the tribes of Israel were to enter.

And do you remember they came back with their report? They came back saying, we can't go and take this land. The people there are bigger and stronger than we are. These Hittites and Jebusites and Ammonites are too powerful.

Who do we think we are? We're like grasshoppers in their sight. But two of the spies dissented from the majority report because they had an unshakable confidence in God.

Joshua and Caleb understood that God had promised them this land and that God was with them. And that if God was with them, then who could stand against them? And so Caleb gives his great confession there in Numbers 13 in verse 30.

Let us go up at once and take possession of the land for we are well able to overcome it. Do you remember the response of the people? What happened? Did they believe their God and decide to stand on his promises?

[11 : 31] No! They believed the unfaithful spies and they wanted to elect a new leader who would take them back to Egypt. And how did God react to their fear and their doubt and their lack of faith?

If you know the story, at first he was going to wipe them out. But it wasn't until after the intercession of Moses that he decides to let them wander in the wilderness for 40 years and die out so that their children would enter into the land.

And you know, in a roundabout way, that's how it is with us as well. Because, you know, as long as we live in this fallen world, there are going to be troubles and strife that we're going to have to go through.

Sometimes we are going to be faced with insurmountable obstacles, challenges to our faith. And sometimes those challenges may seem overwhelming. But my question for you is when that happens, notice I didn't say if that happens.

I said when that happens, where's your confidence going to be? Who are you going to trust in when the times get tough? Are you going to be like Joshua and Caleb and have confidence in the Lord to help you see through those obstacles?

[12 : 38] Are you going to be like David here in our text and look to the Lord and trust in him, not only to hear your prayers, but to answer them for the sake of Christ? You see, you can trust in God to see you through the difficult times because he is a strong refuge for his people.

He's your storm shelter, as it were. So, that's the question. What are you going to do when the next round of the storms of life hit you? Some of you may be going through those storms right now and wondering, what should I do?

How am I going to deal with this? Who are you going to turn to in those moments of crisis? Who or what are you going to put your confidence in? You know, so often in our society we're tempted to put our hope and our trust in other things, aren't we?

Things besides God. Can you think of some of those things that people put their hope and trust and confidence in when things get tough? You know, so often we're tempted to put our trust in other people, aren't we?

Things like our friends or our family or what not. You know, they'll help us. They'll bail us out. And what happens? How many of you know that from time to time other people are going to let you down?

[13 : 42] Even your closest friends and your blood relatives. No! Not my closest friends. Not my blood relatives. They'll always be there for me. Don't be so quick.

Maybe not. You know, sometimes there's nothing that they can do to help. Then again, sometimes even if they can help, they won't for one reason or another.

I think in our society we're often tempted to put our trust and confidence in technology, aren't we? Like the latest medical breakthrough is going to be our savior when we're sick in body or some new psychological therapy is going to help us cope when our world falls apart.

We want to put our trust in technology as if that's our answer. That's the savior. Then again, I think other times we're tempted to look to money as if that's the answer to all our problems.

Have any of you ever been tempted to think like that? No, nobody here. You guys are too spiritual for that. Other people, other Christians sometimes think of money, but certainly nobody here. But yes, sometimes we're tempted to think, you know, if I only had a bigger income, if I only had a trust fund or something like that, then everything would be alright.

[14 : 50] You know, that's when things would go smoothly. If you're like most, you may have thoughts like that from time to time. Then again, I think sometimes we're tempted to simply trust in ourselves.

You know, the old looking out for number one philosophy. You know, nobody's going to help me. Nobody's going to be there for me. And so if I'm going to get through this, it's going to be because I tried harder or applied my own intellect or my own wisdom, my own strength.

You get the idea. What does the scripture say? The scripture tells us, I mean, my goodness, if you get anything from Psalm 27, get this, that when the storms of life come your way, you can look heavenward and trust God to see you through.

To put God first. As Jesus says, therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life. Which of you by worrying can add a single moment to his life? For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. You see, that's what David is doing here in this text. I mean, yes, he's putting God first.

[15 : 51] Yes, his life is in turmoil. I mean, did I mention things are not going very well for him? But he decides to put his trust in God. He's going to resolve to trust in him, let God deliver him.

Verses four and five. You see, David understood that God would never abandon him. That because of his faith, the Lord would protect him, and that God would provide for him as one of his own.

I would say that David remembered the scripture in Deuteronomy 4.31, which says, The Lord your God is a merciful God, and he will not forsake you or destroy you or forget the covenant which he swore.

You see, David understood that. More importantly, David believed that. And that's why he was able to stand rock solid for God even through some of the most difficult crises of his life.

And that's the same kind of belief and trust that you need to have in the Lord as well. The next time this world throws you for a loop. You see, you need to have belief and trust in God's word.

[16 : 54] To trust that God is going to keep his promises to you for the sake of Christ. Believing deep down in your heart. One thing that you know for sure, and that is that God cannot lie no matter what. And that he will see you through.

Point number one. Because God is your refuge, put your confidence in him. Let's move on, shall we? The next thing I want you to take away from this text is how David recognized God as his helper and deliverer in times of need.

When he recognized that he needed God's help, what does he do? He calls out to God. He prays. Look at verses seven to twelve. And here we see David's prayer. Picking up in verse seven.

He says, Hear me as I pray, O Lord, be merciful and answer me. My heart has heard you say, come and talk with me. And my heart responds, Lord, I am coming. Do not turn your back on me. Do not reject your servant in anger.

For you have always been my helper. Don't leave me now. Don't abandon me, O God of my salvation. Even if my father and mother abandoned me, the Lord will hold me close. Teach me how to live, O Lord.

[17 : 58] Lead me along the right path, for my enemies are waiting for me. Do not let me fall into their hands. For they accuse me of things I have never done. And with every breath they threaten me with violence.

All right. So what's happening here? If in the first six verses David is confessing God as his spiritual refuge, in these verses he actually makes his petition.

So here's David's prayer. Notice how he begins his request there in verse seven. He calls on God to hear him and be gracious to him and answer his plea. Excuse me.

You see, David can humbly call on God like that because he's convinced that God is there. Notice how there's no doubt in his prayer. He's not praying like, hello?

God? You hear me? You really there? Remember me? No. There's no prayer like that. Look at verse eight. Once again, he stands on God's word. He takes it at face value. God, you said to seek your face and so here I am doing just that.

[18 : 57] You see, it's not about his emotions. If David relied upon his emotions, he would probably sink into a pit of despair because, did I mention his life was not going very well for him at this point? Like he made a choice.

He made a decision that he's going to stand on the word of God. He's going to praise God with joy in spite of what's going on. Verse six. He's going to believe God's word. He's going to stand on that. God, you told me to seek your face and so here I am seeking your face.

And that seeking your face language is simply another way of saying worship in spirit and in truth. Genuine heartfelt worship. That's what God was calling him to do. And David confesses that he'll do just that.

And because of that heartfelt obedience, he's convinced that God is pleased to hear his petition. Again, look at verse nine. Do not turn your back on me. Do not reject your servant in anger. For you have always been my helper.

Don't leave me now. Don't abandon me. Oh God of my salvation. You see, here David is crying out that regardless of all the turmoil and drama and strife all around him, the last thing he wants is to be cut off from fellowship with God.

[20 : 01] He wants God to be with him. Sort of like his other prayer in Psalm 23 where he's willing to face the valley of the shadow of death. Why? Because God is with him.

God's rod and staff comforts him. You see, it doesn't matter what this fallen world might throw his way. Wars, hardship, bloodshed, turmoil, all these things are manageable as long as God is with him.

As long as he knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is going to be there to guide him. Verse 11. Teach me how to live, O Lord. Lead me along the right path for my enemies are waiting for me.

See, as long as he has this conviction that God is going to keep him on the straight and narrow, he can face tomorrow. And the day after that. And the next day after that. Because he knows that God is going to protect him.

Look at verse 10. Oh, he has enemies out there, all right. And they are plotting against him. And they have nothing in their hearts toward him except ill will and malice and hatred.

[21 : 02] And they mean to do him harm. I'm talking physically here. Verse 12 speaks of violence. That's the kind of trouble that David was in. But that's okay.

That's okay too. He can face that as well. Because he knows that God is going to be there to protect him. It's kind of like Christ standing before Pilate when the governor said, Don't you know that I have the power to crucify you and the power to release you?

And how did Christ respond? You could have no power at all against me unless it were given to you from above. How true it is. And that's how David understood his enemies as well.

They couldn't touch him as long as God was protecting him. See, he knew that as long as God was his refuge, he could call on him for help. You know, it makes me think of our modern 999 system here in the UK, right?

In the USA we call it 911, but it's the same thing. I mean, what do you do? Who do you call when you're faced with some kind of crisis or emergency? I need police. I need fire.

[22 : 04] I need medical. Who do you call for help? Well, you call 999, right? And you know when you call 999, there's always somebody there who can take your call and send help right away. You know when you call that number, you are not going to get the answering machine.

You're not going to get a receptionist who's going to put you on hold. You're going to get through to somebody who not only wants to help you, but someone who has the power to dispatch aid immediately.

And in a way, that's sort of what we have with God as well. We can call on him at any time. We know that he has the power to dispatch aid immediately. And there's no question that God desires to help his children.

I mean, as Jesus said, if a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? If he asks for a fish, will he give him a snake? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

You see, God loves to bless his children. And that's why we go to him in prayer, taking our troubles and our cares and our concerns to him. As Peter said, casting all your cares on him, for he cares for you.

[23 : 13] And we can rest assured that God will answer in the way that's best. And we can rest in that. You see, that's where David's confidence came from.

Because he knew that no matter what happened, God was looking out for his best interest. Because God really was his great shepherd. Now that doesn't mean that God always answers us in the way that we want him to.

But that doesn't change the fact that the things that God does for us, he does for our good. Sort of like the story of the three Hebrews and the fiery furnace and Daniel. You all know the story.

All those who refused to bow down and worship King Nebuchadnezzar's idol were to be cast alive into the fiery furnace. And those three young men stood up before the king and they said, Our God who we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace.

And he will deliver us from your hand, O king. But even if he doesn't, let it be known that we don't serve your gods nor will we worship the golden image that you've set up. You see, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they were counting on God to answer their prayer.

[24 : 16] To spare them from the fiery furnace. But their faith was reflected when they said, But even if he doesn't, let it be known that we won't bow. You see, they were content to trust God.

And did God spare them from the burning fiery furnace? No. They went in. But God went in there with them as the fourth man. You know the story. You see, they were content to trust God even if he didn't answer them the way they wanted him to.

And that's the way it needs to be with us as well. Because when the times get tough, we need to call on God for help and to trust him to answer in the way that he knows his best.

So that means you need to call on God when you find yourself going through your tough times. And you need to believe deep in your heart that he's not only able to help you, but that he's willing to help.

Because sometimes when you need help, it's easy to find someone who's able to help, but they're not willing. Or vice versa. Sometimes it's easy to find someone who's willing to help, but they're not able. But the good news is that God is both able and willing to bless his children who call on him in times of trouble.

[25 : 24] Now you might say, well that sounds all fine and good, Dr. Carter, but that doesn't match my reality. Because I once went through a hard time and I called on God to help and he didn't do anything. Well, what about that?

Well, let's be straight. There's no easy answers to that. I mean, there can be any number of reasons why God didn't answer your prayer the way you wanted him to. First of all, let's admit that he's God and he's under no obligation to any of us.

None of us can make God our debtor. But secondly, we know that even if he didn't answer us the way we wanted him to, we can rest assured that he did hear our prayer of faith if we approached him through the merits of Jesus Christ.

And thirdly, we can also rest assured that whatever he did or didn't do was in our best interest. Now, do you believe that? I mean, doesn't the apostle say that all things work together for the good, for those who love God and are called according to his purpose?

All things? Do you believe that? Now, it may not have seemed like it to Joseph when he was sitting in prison, falsely accused. But when we fast forward to Genesis 50, we see at the end of the story he realizes what others meant for evil toward him, God ultimately meant for the good.

[26 : 35] Then again, doesn't God sometimes permit us to suffer in order to chastise us for our own wrongdoing? Indeed, this is what's happening to David right here in our text. Isn't that what Hebrews 12 and the whole concept of divine discipline, God's fatherly displeasure, that's what it's all about.

Even God's children will sometimes have to face the temporal consequences of their sin. Then again, sometimes God uses tough times as a means to cultivate godly virtue in his people.

Now, I know you don't want to hear that. But at the same time, that's what the apostle teaches us in Romans chapter 5 and verse 3, when he says he rejoices in his sufferings because he knows that suffering produces perseverance and perseverance produces what?

Character. Character. Character. Character. Then again, at other times there may seem to be no good reason, no logical reason why bad things are happening to good people.

But we can rest assured that God is sovereign over those circumstances as well, even though we may not understand them. Isn't that what the book of Job is all about? Indeed, there was a whole lot more going on in the heavenlies than what Job can perceive.

[27 : 47] And as you fast forward to the end of the story, Job never does find out why he was forced to endure all those trials. But in any case, the bottom line is that when trials and tribulations come, God has not left us alone.

He himself is our refuge and he calls us to prayer that we might trust in him to shepherd our souls. So how can we summarize Psalm 27?

God is our hiding place. He's our sanctuary. Our storm shelter, as it were. A refuge in time of storm. And because of that, we can trust in him to take care of us when we feel overwhelmed or anxious or in despair.

We can have confidence in him that he is there to shepherd our souls through the storms of life. And that he's there to hear our prayers and answer them for the sake of Christ.

So what should our attitude be when those trials and difficulties come? Take a look at the last two verses. Verses 13 and 14. Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's goodness while I am here in the land of the living.

[28 : 53] Wait patiently for the Lord. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the Lord. Now that is confession of hope. And that needs to be your confession the next time you feel like you are at the end of the road.

Because that was the confession of your Savior when he was facing his darkest hour. Now pay careful attention here because I want to tie this all together by showing you Christ in the passage. Please understand, in this Psalm, David is a type of Christ.

He is the king of Israel in distress. He is about to face his enemies. Wicked men are plotting against him and they seek his life. Verse 3. False witnesses have arisen to condemn him.

Verse 12. Even his closest friends and family have abandoned him. Verse 10. And yet his hope and trust is in the Lord. And even as this Psalm is the prayer of David, the earthly king, in his darkest hour.

Even as this Psalm is the prayer of Christ, the heavenly king, in his darkest hour. May it also be yours. That like David, that like Christ, your faith may be tried by fire and found true to the glory of God.

[30 : 05] Amen.