

Psalm 27

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- [0 : 0 0] One thing have I asked of the Lord that I will seek after. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.
- For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of his tent. He will lift me high upon a rock. Amen.
- I have a picture in my living room. There it is. As you can see, it's looking out a window. There's sunlit lawn and shrubs and trees in the background. And then right outside the window, you can see another little tree with a bird sitting on the branch singing away.
- There's a, you can see the little like, I guess it's an oil lamp and some glasses on the windowsill. And then there's a page from, it looks like a page from a hymn book there.
- [1 : 1 1] Although it's just that blank, that sheet of paper with a pen and the ink beside it. Like someone has just written it out or, yeah. And there's lilies on the desk.
- White. And you can see there's a lot of like contrast of light and darkness in there. The light is outside and coming into the darkness of the room and shining on that hymn.
- So, the hymn is, you might guess, this is my father's world, which is what the painting is called.
- We just sang it, but let me just read a couple of verses. This is my father's world and to my listening ears, all nature sings and round me rings the music of the spheres.
- This is my father's world, the birds their carols raise, the morning light, the lily white, declare their maker's praise. So, yeah.
- [2 : 1 8] This hymn was written by a guy named Maltby Babcock, a Presbyterian minister in the late 1800s. He was, when he was a young pastor, there he is.
- When he was a young pastor up in upstate New York, right near Niagara Falls, and up near Lake Ontario there, he would go for walks in the countryside, and apparently that's when he wrote this poem, although it wasn't published until after he died in around 1900.
- The poem had like 16 stanzas, two lines each, and so when it's said as a hymn, they have to select some of the verses, the best known ones.
- So, yeah, a very well-known hymn. It celebrates creation bearing witness to God's reign and goodness and beauty and praising him. It also talks about God speaking to us through creation.
- There's the lines that we sang, This is my father's world, he shines in all its fear, in the rustling grass I hear him pass. He speaks to me everywhere.
- [3 : 3 1] You're probably familiar with this idea that God speaks to us through creation. There's various passages in the Bible that speak about that, like Psalm 19, saying that the heavens declare the glory of God.

In Romans 1, Paul says, Ever since the creation of the world, God's eternal power and divine nature have been understood through the things that he has made. In Acts 14, Paul says that God has not left himself without a witness in doing good, giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.

In fact, in the Te Deum that we just prayed, there was the line, Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of your glory. That's all great, but you're probably wondering, what does this have to do with Psalm 27?

It doesn't talk about flowers and butterflies and cute furry creatures, or even thunderstorms and sea monsters, which the Bible says speak to us about God.

Although there are monsters, I guess, or monstrosity in this psalm, talks about evildoers intent on devouring flesh, armies, false witnesses.

[4 : 49] It's obviously about someone in danger crying out to God for deliverance. It seems a long way from like this dreamy pastor wandering through the countryside or someone looking out the window at their pretty garden while sipping a cup of tea.

Well, so we'll look at the psalm, and I'll see if I can connect it back to the view out the window and the hymn. We're going to go through it verse by verse, so if you have your Bible or your phone or whatever, you can follow along.

There are Bibles here if you need them, and we'll be looking at Psalm 27, but let's just pray before we do that. Father, we thank you that you are our light and our salvation, our mighty fortress and our rock.

We need fear nobody and nothing, but we want to have our holy fear of you. We come to you and your word with sin-stained souls and darkened understanding, and we thank you that in Jesus you have washed us clean and are renewing our hearts and minds according to your will.

Please give me grace to speak the truth and give us all wisdom, courage, and faith to hear you speak and to live according to the truth of your gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.

[6 : 04] So the Psalms, we're doing a summer series on the Psalms. The novice preacher is the one who's starting the series, which seems a little off, but anyway, this is like the, what do they call it, the pilot in a TV show, and you don't know if it's going to be any good or not, but anyway, so don't judge the rest of the series by this.

So anyway, so we'll be looking at the Psalms. I'm not going to give a whole overview of them, but as you know, you're probably familiar with them.

It's a collection of 150 poems or songs that were part of the worship of the Jewish people starting from the time of King David. David, in the Psalms, a lot of them are attributed to David, about half of them say of David or a Psalm of David or something like that.

We don't really know what it means exactly when it says that, but people think that, you know, at least the kernel of a lot of the Psalms were written by him or maybe even the whole Psalm.

But, you know, sometimes they're shaped by the later experiences of the people of Israel. But these are the things we know about David. He was a skilled musician.

[7 : 26] He was hired or he was brought to the court at first when Saul was king because Saul was being attacked by evil spirits or an evil spirit from the Lord, actually, it says.

I don't know how that works. But anyway, but David played music for him to bring him peace and to calm his mind and his soul.

So he was obviously played the lyre, which is like a guitar kind of thing. We know that he was a wild dancer. In 2 Samuel chapter 6, when they were bringing the ark back to Jerusalem or to Jerusalem for the first time, three times in that chapter, his wild, crazy dancing is sort of vividly described.

We know that David put up a tent in Jerusalem to accommodate the ark as a place of worship. It was a sign of God's presence with his people.

In the next chapter, 2 Samuel chapter 7, we see that David wanted to build a temple for God. But through the prophet, God told him that that job would be left to his son.

[8 : 42] But if you read Chronicles, we see that David helped in the preparation for the building of the temple by supplying a lot of materials, and he planned out the liturgy and the musical leadership of it.

So he was a passionate worshiper, a dancer, and a poet. Humanly speaking, he was also violent and promiscuous and deeply flawed.

But nevertheless, the Bible, because of his humility and his contrition, he's described as being a man after God's own heart. So these are things we know about David, who it said wrote this psalm.

So let's take a look at it and what he says to us. There are 14 verses, and the books that I was reading, commentaries and that kind of thing, all see it as being divided into four sections.

I'm a musician, and so when I sort of naturally go to musical sort of ideas and images and concepts that help me understand things sometimes, and so when I was thinking of these four sections in the psalm, I thought of kind of like a symphony or a sonata, which is the same idea, but just for one or two instruments, where you've got a big piece of music that's divided into four separate, we call them movements.

[10 : 16] So it's like four separate pieces of music, but they come together to form one artistic expression. And as I was reading through this psalm, it kind of struck me that these four sections kind of flow that way.

In a symphony, you have the first and the last ones are generally more energetic and upbeat and loud and positive feeling. Generally speaking, this is usually how it goes, whereas the two in the middle are a little slower, especially the second movement is more like reflective, and then the third movement is more like a dance, actually, typically, and then moves us to the last one, which is, again, energetic and upbeat.

So just indulge me a little here, and we'll go through the four movements of this psalm and see if that helps us understand it. So the first movement, we meet the enemies, okay?

Verses one to three, you can follow along. 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? There's evildoers assailing to eat up my flesh, adversaries and foes, but when they do, it's they who stumble and fall.

And even though an army is encamped against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war rise against me, yet I will be confident. So obviously, there's a tone of confidence and trust in the Lord, his light and his salvation.

[11 : 51] At the same time, obviously, there is danger and opposition. All right? Why would he be talking about fear unless there's something to be afraid of? And I think this is something that we can all relate to, this sense of danger and trouble, which naturally leads to fear and enemies.

Obviously, in the news, we see there's actual wars going on in the world and in the cities, there's violence in the streets, in our homes, maybe not in your home, but obviously, we're aware of situations where there's violence and conflict.

Perhaps you might be, like the psalmist, a victim of slander, enemies speaking evil of you. It could be that your enemy is a disease or something in your body, in your mind, in your spirit.

So David was familiar with that idea through his helping Saul overcome that attack from an evil spirit. Maybe there's conflict in your family.

Some people wonder if this psalm was about when David's son, Absalom, rebelled against him and tried to take over the kingship. Or perhaps it's your boss.

[13 : 15] That can be an enemy for some people. I was just talking to people at the eight o'clock service and they were telling me that one of them, their boss had just resigned and that was a good thing because they had given them a lot of trouble.

And David's boss, Saul, caused him a lot of trouble. In fact, he was intent on killing him even though David was nothing but loyal to him. So we're not sure what are the enemies that are referred to here, but it could be a neighbor.

David fought against these neighboring nations like the Philistines. So I'm sure there's different ways that we can relate to what the psalmist is going through here.

But whatever is the enemy that we're facing, we know that the Lord, the creator of the universe, and the one whose love is steadfast and faithful is our light and our salvation.

He brings wisdom and truth, deliverance and vindication. Our life is in his hands. The more we realize what he's done for us in Jesus, forgiving our sins and winning us eternal life, triumphing over sin and death and the evil one, we can enter into the ringing confidence of the psalmist who knows that in God we're more than conquerors.

[14 : 36] This movement, musically, would be like a rousing, maybe march by Beethoven or something like that, exuberantly triumphing over the threat of war and destruction.

The second movement, starting at verse 4, brings a tone of peace and stillness and tranquility as the psalmist invites us through his prayer to God for the one thing that he desires above all else, to be in God's presence.

One thing I ask of the Lord that I will seek after, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

It's almost like just this silence comes in and you're just in this stillness, gazing, delighting in God and inquiring, that is, seeking to learn from God and grow.

there's echoes here of Psalm 23, which is just a few psalms before in the Psalter where David talks about God leading him beside streams of still water, restoring his soul and he talks about at the end of that that he will dwell, he's confident of dwelling in the house of the Lord all the days of his life and there are enemies in Psalm 23 as well, right?

[16 : 11] You prepare a feast before me in the presence of my enemies so in spite of the conflict and the things around us, God, when we enter his presence and fix our gaze on him, gives us this peace and also a sense of protection, deliverance and grateful worship.

In Psalm 16, 11, it says that in God's presence is fullness of joy. Think of that old hymn, chorus, turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

David reiterates his love for God's presence by using five different descriptions of, well, going into that holy place.

He talks about it as a house of the Lord, a temple which is not necessarily talking about the temple that eventually Solomon built but just a more general idea.

It could also be translated a palace. It's a place where a king or a divinity would live. A house, a temple, a shelter, a tent, so shelter is the idea of being covered.

[17 : 28] A tent is more the idea of being like a place of hospitality and welcome. Like Abraham, actually, we've been reading about him, how he's pitched his tent and invited strangers to come in with him.

And finally, a rock, so God's presence, God's house is like a rock or a fortress, a safe, strong place. So, we can sense in this music, if it was set to music, it would be still and calm and peaceful, but also these notes of joy and praise, I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy, singing and making melody to the Lord.

There's a tone of gratitude for what God has done. I guess the question is, if it was David who wrote this psalm, this longing to be in God's house, is it meant to be sort of taken as a literal thing or more of a poetic expression of wanting to be in God's presence?

I mean, the tent was there in David's lifetime because he says to Nathan, the prophet, you know, look, God's living in a house of tent, but I'm in a house of cedar.

I mean, he could have moved into the tent if he wanted to, but, and to, you know, I'm sure that would have been a nice refuge for him from all the wars and battles that he had to deal with and politics and wives and this kind of thing.

[19 : 03] And he longed for peace and justice, a time when God would put things right. And, of course, this hope of justice and peace was developed more and more through the Old Testament, through the prophets.

They envisaged the holiness of God flooding the nations in a future age of righteousness. But, during David's time, the access to the temple and God's holy place was only for those who were made richly clean and priests could only, of course, go into the most holy place.

But, this idea of him offering sacrifices to God as a king actually points us to Jesus. Often, we use that expression, he's the prophet, priest, and king.

And, by his sacrifice, like he says here, I will offer sacrifices. And, as we sort of heard in that Hebrews text, Jesus makes a way for us all to enter into God's presence and dwell with him forever.

Looking at the cross, we see his beauty, and following him, we can inquire and learn from him, meditate on his life, death, and resurrection, and we rest on him as the rock of our salvation, delighting in his deliverance and exalting over our enemies by faith in him.

[20 : 23] This fourth verse here, one commentator says about that singleness of purpose and the priorities within that purpose, that is, to dwell in the house of the Lord and to inquire of him.

He says it is the very essence of worship and of discipleship. And so I invite you to think about that, what it means to want to be in God's presence and to delight in him, gaze on him, and inquire of him.

It reminds us actually of Jesus when he was a child. he spent time in the temple and was actually thought that was the natural place for him to be, was surprised.

Remember when his parents said to him, where were you? He said, well, where else would I be but in my father's house? And it says that he was sat at the feet of the teachers listening to them and asking them questions.

And that's what God wants us to do, wants us to spend time with him, whether it's in his word or gathering in Bible studies or in church. The New Testament, of course, says that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, so we don't have a temple to go to anymore, but as we gather with each other and by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit is with us, we can spend time with God and sit and learn and, yeah, that's kind of what we're doing today, right?

[21 : 54] Gathering together. And so we thank God for Jesus setting us that example and the psalmist, the essence of worship and of discipleship. That's the second movement.

Third movement, which I put the title, a hungry heart seeking rest in God. This is verses 7 to 10. So the threat of trouble is returning here, right?

We see it in verse 7. Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me, so he needs help from God. But it's tempered here not so much by this ringing confidence in the opening section but almost a note of contrition and a longing for connection with God that seems to be born out of the experience of God's presence that we just saw in the second section.

It's not really clear why the psalmist is concerned that God might cast him off or forsake him. But he's earnestly seeking God's face but he says don't hide your face from me which of course is his longing.

But we do know that in scripture we see that when people behold the holiness of God and his awesomeness often the response is well a kind of holy fear.

[23 : 21] Peter when Jesus caught that miraculous catch of fish he fell at his feet and he said go away from me Lord for I am a sinful man.

Or in Revelation John sees the vision of God the glorified Christ and he falls at his feet as though dead.

And so I think he comes he realizes that to dwell in God's presence also means to deal with the sin in his life. Certainly reading these verses would suggest that when he's talking about the temple in the second section it's more of a poetic idea because otherwise he would still be there right?

But now he's back talking about the dangers that he's experiencing and the trouble but he knows that God is faithful and he says even if my father and mother have forsaken me but you can also translate it if my father and mother forsake me yet the Lord will still take me in.

This desperate hunger for God comes from knowing that no one else but him can save and we're utterly dependent on God's grace for salvation.

[24 : 50] Be gracious and answer me he says. Once again we're pointed to the cross here when we think about Jesus on the cross he was utterly forsaken by his disciples, his family, he's thrown completely on the mercy of God.

And as we read he cried aloud to God to the one who's able to save him from death and was heard because of his reverent submission. And God did save him.

At first he descended into hell of course to take the punishment for our sins but then he's raised on Easter Sunday. He tasted the depth of what it meant to be forsaken by God for our sake.

But then God delivers him because of his righteousness. This sacrifice and self giving love allows us to seek and see God's face.

To be welcomed by God into our true heavenly home, his presence forever. Not made right by our efforts but by the mercy and faithfulness of Christ.

[26 : 05] So as I said this third movement is like a dance. and I see that in sort of the way the conversation goes back and forth. You know, you have said, Lord, seek my face.

My heart says to you, your face, Lord, do I seek. There's a sort of back and forthness and it leads us out of that still place into more moving forward in life, life, which is kind of how the third movement of a symphony works.

So, finally, fourth section, fourth movement, a steadfast obedience, faithful and courageous. I guess I'll read these words.

Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Give me not up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me and they breathe out violence.

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord. Be strong and let your heart take courage. Wait for the Lord. One thing we notice here is a movement in who the psalmist is addressing.

[27 : 20] So, in the first verse, he's talking to God, praying that he'll teach him his way, which gets back to that verse four where he talks about inquiring of the Lord, that theme of discipleship.

So, teach me a way, lead me on the path of life. So, he's praying to God and then he's sort of talking to himself almost. I believe, he's just reiterating his faith, I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

And then thirdly, he speaks to other people. Wait for the Lord. Be strong. So, there's a movement through here out of what God has done in him and God's teaching him to exhorting other people to that faith.

But yeah, there's a sense of almost like a march, like moving forward in life. what else was I going to say about this?

Oh yeah, so the enemies, so again it echoes back to that first section because in the first section he talks about the enemies stumbling and falling when they attack him.

[28 : 40] But now he's praying for God to uphold him as he goes forward on the path of faith in spite of the enemy attacks. So there's a sort of echo there of what we saw in the first section.

Also, we see a connection with the beginning part in this idea of vision because he says, he's talking about, I will look on the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

And at the beginning of the psalm he talked about God being his light. And so God gives us light to see his goodness. I just, what I see here is that as redemption works through history, we return from the wilderness to the garden, right, because of what Jesus has done.

It's only by grace that we receive salvation, deliverance, and blessing. This note of courage, wait for the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage, wait for the Lord, again, it bookends the psalm which started asking, who will I fear?

So, that's symphony in four movements, Psalm 27. So, back to our hymn and the hymn writer, Maltby.

[30 : 07] he was an admired pastor and preacher and poet and musician, kind of like David, but he had enemies, maybe not human ones, but vicious enemies.

The enemy of death stole, he only had two children, neither of them survived out of infancy. he struggled with the enemies of doubt and depression.

One of the lines of the hymn that we didn't sing, but it's in the poem, he says, why should my heart be sad? And so obviously there's a sense that he dealt with sadness.

He dealt with enemies of injustice and poverty. He pastored a big urban church and was very concerned for the poor and kind of wore himself out with his efforts in caring for the persecuted.

And he died very young. He was only 42 when he died. He got a bacterial, like some neurological infection and he succumbed to darkness and exhaustion and he died.

[31 : 29] But in his life, in the land of the living, he waited for God. And we see in the hymn that God was his confidence and his salvation like the psalmist.

And that he was listening for his voice, just like David was when he says, and looking at him, he shines in all its fear, he speaks to me everywhere. God, the ruler of the world, his father's world, was the ruler of his heart.

I just want to talk about light and darkness a little bit. And so if we look at the picture again, one thing I didn't mention before, but you might have noticed, is that the shadow of the window, the bits of wood across the window, which are called mountains, by the way, if you need some architectural information, I learned that, they make a cross on the hymn as it lies on the desk there.

And the artist is saying that it's the cross by which we really see God most fully in this world.

And it's that last verse we sang, Jesus, the battle is not done. Battle against these enemies is not done. Jesus who died shall be satisfied and earth and heaven will be won.

[32 : 59] So it's like the light out there is coming into the darkness here and that's what God is doing through Jesus and as we live out our lives in faith, the light of heaven is coming into the darkness of our world.

And obviously there is still dark but we carry his light and his salvation with us as we bear witness to Jesus. this idea of the light coming into the world and putting things right was captured by the artist Louis Tiffany, heard of Tiffany Glass.

So Tiffany, after the hymn writer Maltby Babcock died, he was commissioned to make a stained glass window in his memory. There it is.

So this is in the church that he pastored in Baltimore. It's one of, I think, the two biggest stained glass windows that Tiffany made.

Down the bottom, you probably can't read it, but it says his name, Maltby Davenport Babcock. So this picture, this stained glass is called the Holy City.

[34 : 18] It's in reference to Revelation chapter 21 where John sees the holy city, the new Jerusalem, which is replacing the Jerusalem where David lived and where the tent was, were formerly the signs of God presence with humanity.

But now this new Jerusalem is coming out of heaven from God as a bride adorned for her husband. I'll just read the rest of that little passage there.

It says, a bride adorned her husband, and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, see, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them and they will be his peoples and God himself will be with them.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more. No more battles, no more enemies, for the first things have passed away.

And the one who is seated on the throne said, see, I'm making all things new. Thank you, God. He's making all things new, a new creation, a new father's world, which we will delight in for eternity.

[35 : 35] And we will dwell in the land of the truly living. And the one that the hearts of the faithful desire and seek after above all else. will be, our desire to be with him will be fully and eternally realized.

We will behold his beauty and learn from him forever. Until then, we wait with courage as God strengthens our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

being. As I wrap things up, I just want to mention this book that is maybe my favorite Christian book.

It's called One Thousand Gifts. It's by a Canadian farm girl named Anne Voskamp. She's from southern Ontario.

Anyway, she talks about what she calls the Eucharistic life. That's a life of gratitude and a life that's shaped by the cross. When we celebrate communion, we call it Eucharist.

[36 : 40] It's a love feast, a celebration of thankfulness. She talks about this psalm in the book, about verse four, where it says the one thing that I desire is to be with the Lord.

And what she says about this verse is, I want to see God endlessly. I long to merge with beauty, breathe it into lungs, feel it heavy on skin, to beat the door of the universe, pound the chest of God with the psalmist.

So that I want to be with you, God, is what he's praying. Faith is the gaze of the soul, and I want to see in so I can enter into God. God. And she has this line in the book, just five words, that I have taped to the bottom of my picture of the hymn there.

The line is, all the world is window. She says, no material is opaque. If we're willing to see people, circumstances, situations, relationships, enemies, all is transparent.

All of this globe is but glass to God. God, and Eucharist, thankfulness, washes the glass. It's redemptive work wiping away the soot of our days.

[38 : 02] You know, Paul says that now we see in a mirror darkly, but when God puts things right, we will see face to face. And we can be mirrors or windows ourselves of God's work in the world.

People can look at us. And so I pray for myself that I will be a window and also that I will see others and see my life as a window to God.

What is he teaching me? Lord, lead me on your path and teach me your way. Show me your face, your face, oh Lord, do I seek. God's work. We need those glasses, right, that were sitting on the windowsill to see the glasses of faith, the spectacles of faith to see what God is doing in the world and in our lives.

And then, no matter what are our circumstances, we can live in thankfulness, singing and making melody to the Lord, as David said, bringing our sacrifice of praise.

We had a workshop yesterday about singing and we talked about the sacrifice of praise. You might not always feel like praising God, but when we remember Jesus, we have nothing but gratitude for the salvation that he's won for us.

[39 : 33] I think of Paul and Silas, you know, when they were beaten up, unarmed, unjustly and thrown into jail and singing hymns at midnight.

I wouldn't be singing hymns at midnight if I was Paul and Silas and being whipped and beaten. I'd be curled up in a ball feeling sorry for myself. But they knew so much the grace of God that they could sing and bear witness and speak words of peace to their enemies and calm when there was trouble and earthquakes.

I pray that we'd be like that no matter what our circumstances. We'd still be praising God. I pray that we'd be people of gratitude, strength and courage, led by God on his level pathways wherever life's journeys take us, seeking his face in the window of the father's world, his tender love being greater than that of any human parent.

second Peter 3:12 says we are waiting for and hastening his coming and we can do that as we rest in Jesus and put our trust in him.

And when he comes, earth and heaven will be one as the hymn says. God will finally put things right. Jesus who died will be satisfied and the last enemy will be defeated.

[41 : 07] In him we have life and salvation and so we seek his face in all our days. Amen.