

A Shelter in the Storm

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Well, my name is Ben. My wife and I and our family have been a part of this church from the very beginning. So, super excited to be in this psalm with you today.

We're going through like our favorite psalms. And so, the pastoral team asked a few of us to find our favorite psalm and to teach on it. So, we're going to be in Psalm 27.

If you want to go ahead and turn there. Psalm 27. You know, it seems like so much of our life is lived in the superficial.

Or at least it seems that's the way we communicate. That's the way we talk to each other. It sounds like this. It actually sounded like this this morning. So, it's like, hey man, how are you?

[1 : 05] Great. And you? Good. How's the family? Not bad. Have a good summer? Yeah, man. Back to school?

Yep. Hey, I'm praying for you. You too, man. Alright, take care. And that's it. Right? Does that sound familiar to you?

This could literally be the transcript of so many of my conversations. Yet, the frightening thing is, is that it kind of sounds that way. Whether things are going well or they're really bad.

But Psalm 27 isn't like that. Psalm 27 doesn't live in the superficial conversations. It gets down to business.

Psalm 27 is a psalm about honesty and hope. In it, we feel the tension of a life of trouble, yet a God of grace.

[2 : 08] It's a psalm of fear, but in it, fear gives way to confidence in God. It's a psalm of danger. But it speaks with power and practicality of the safety that can be found in the Lord.

In many ways, it's a sad psalm. Yet, it is punctuated with songs of joy. It's a psalm of rejection. But it sings the acceptance of the Lord.

It's a psalm of action, yet it finds its strength in waiting on the Lord. Does this not sound like real life? Psalm 27 is for people who are struggling.

People who suffer. People who need care for their souls. It's for people who need to be reminded that God is good even when life isn't.

It's for me. It's for you. So let's read it together. Psalm 27, verse 1, it says, The Lord is my light and my salvation.

[3 : 21] Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. 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.

And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me. And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy. I will sing and I will make melody to the Lord.

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud. Be gracious to me and answer me. You have said, Seek my face. And my heart says to you, Your face, Lord, do I seek.

[4 : 42] Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger. O you who have been my help, cast me not off. Forsake me not, O God of my salvation.

For my father and my mother have forsaken me. But the Lord will take me in. 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. Amen. David is who we presume to be the author of this psalm.

David does not have his life together. Right now, indeed, he is not living his best life. Here, the man who we read so much about in the psalms for his faith and trust in God is really facing some turmoil.

[5 : 57] We don't know exactly the historical context, the exact moment that this was written, but we do know that at one point, David's former boss, King Saul, wanted to and tried to kill him several times.

How's work going? Well, my boss keeps trying to kill me. David might say, and you thought your boss was bad. Or this could have been written when David's son Absalom rebels.

Absalom betrays his dad and tries to kill David. Let's just say that he might have been better at shepherding sheep than shepherding his own child. But isn't that how life goes sometimes?

As the poem by Robert Burns says, the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry. Well, it seems like David's life has gone awry. So when we read this, it kind of makes us ask, where was God in this?

And where is God in your life? I think this song kind of has a central point that we see throughout it. And I think today the Lord is reminding us that God is a faithful companion in times of trouble.

[7 : 15] God is a faithful companion in times of trouble. So we're going to work through this in a few different sections. So there's three sections I've kind of divided it in that I think naturally happens.

So number one, verses one through three, is God is with you, do not fear. Number two is God responds in the time of trouble. And number three, God gives grace for the future.

So verses one through three, do not fear. So I love how David kind of begins this psalm with a declaration. It's like he builds a fort around his heart, so to speak.

But the thing is, this fort is built with confidence, but not in confidence in himself, but confidence in the Lord. It's though he knows he's about to go to war, so he has to sharpen his axe, so to speak.

He says, 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?

[8 : 21] It's like he knows he's going into something very difficult, so he preps himself. We sometimes do something similar when we're about to walk into a difficult situation, maybe a tough conversation, where we say to ourselves, you can get through this.

It's important. I know this is hard, but you can do it. The right thing is on the other side of this conversation. It'll be worth it. And maybe you and I have both been on both sides of that conversation, but sometimes you just have to go through it.

You're going to want to quit, but do not have fear. But look at what David faced. It says, evildoers wanted to eat up his flesh.

I can't recall the last time evildoers wanted to eat up my flesh. Can you? Has that happened in your life? But yet, David has real enemies.

There's an army encamped around him. War is rising. Do you get the picture? It's not going well. It kind of reminds me of this movie that I used to love, Behind Enemy Lines.

[9 : 33] There was a fighter pilot who goes down behind enemy lines in his jet, and throughout the whole movie, you're like, he's going to die. It's not going well. Oh, how did he escape that?

He'll definitely die next, but he never dies. It's kind of like that. But yet, David doesn't seem afraid.

Or rather, why is he confident?

What does David know that we don't know? Well, I think it has to do with who he is confident in.

He's confident in the Lord.

David describes the Lord as his light, his salvation, and the stronghold of his life. Light, salvation, and stronghold.

For the Christian, light is very important. For me, light is very important. So, if you didn't know, I work professionally as a photographer. Did you know that the word photography literally means drawing with light?

[10:39] How convenient. I think about light all the time. I might not know much, but I know light. I know the color, the tint of it, how it reflects, and how it refracts.

The intensity, the way it falls in a room across the space. Truth is, I'm regularly judging the light at the Y. I'm kind of a lighting snob.

But David is thinking something a little deeper than shadows and highlights at the Y. He's talking about the light of his soul. The Bible teaches us that we were once in darkness, indeed blind.

It's a song we sang, lost in darkest night. Yet we didn't even realize it. We had no realization that we were in darkness, or we could even perceive the need that we needed light.

One of the unique things about East Tennessee is a little place called the Lost Sea. It's this underground lake that this kid stumbled upon and found one time.

[11:49] And if you go on a tour, the guide says, you get to a point kind of way down, and the tour guide says, all right, we're going to turn off our flashlights, and you're going to experience something that very few people in the world ever get to experience.

total, complete darkness. Not even a hint of light. And when you turn off the flashlight, it is truly bizarre.

Because just like in normal times when you turn off the light, your eyes kind of adjust, and you can see little hints of things. Not in the Lost Sea, it is dark. But yet, when a flicker of light comes on, when the tour guide says, turn on your flashlight, then all of a sudden, everything that was dark comes to light.

And you're like, thank you that my flashlight worked. But this is a picture of salvation. Our hearts were dark, completely blind, completely dark, unable to see, and God illuminates our hearts and our eyes and moves us from darkness to light.

He reveals to us the truth. There were two quotes that I wanted to share that I felt like really supported this. Charles Spurgeon says this, salvation finds us in the dark, but it does not leave us there.

[13:15] It gives light to those who sit in the valley of the shadow of death. After conversion, our God is our comfort, our joy, our comfort, guide, teacher, and in every sense, our light.

He is light within, light around, light reflected from us, and light to be revealed to us. There's another quote just kind of on the back of that.

It says this, note, it is not said merely that the Lord just gives light, but that He is light, nor that He gives salvation, but that He is salvation.

Whom shall I fear? A question which is its own answer. The powers of darkness are not to be feared, for the Lord, our light, destroys them.

And the damnation of hell is not to be dreaded by us, for the Lord is our salvation. Amen. Did you know, as I was reading this, I thought, I wonder how often the Bible tells us to not fear, to do not fear.

[14:22] Well, it happens around 170 times. It seems like God knows we're prone to fear, that we're prone to anxiety. And the truth is, there's a lot to be afraid of.

Life is crazy sometimes. It's uncontrollable. Bad things happen. So we try to, we try to keep a strong grip on things. The repeated saying or command to not fear is founded on the fact that God is our light, our salvation, and our stronghold.

He's supporting our reason to not fear. This threefold description of the Lord, it kind of covers every need of our soul.

Here, David gives us a lesson on how to deal with our fears, and he faced real ones. It's as though David read ahead in Romans 8, 28, where it says, and we know that for those who love God and are called according to His purposes, that all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.

David knows that in spite of his circumstances, or rather in the middle of really bad circumstances, that God is near. This quote by Tim Keller says, to know God is your light means He shows you the truth.

[15:46] As your salvation, He rescues you from danger. As your stronghold, He protects you in every circumstance. These are not abstract ideas for David.

They are lived experiences of grace. So God is for you. Number one, God is with you.

Do not fear. Number two, God responds in times of trouble. Verses 4 through 12. So as we've seen, David's writing about being under attack.

These would be difficult circumstances for any of us. And as shocking as this psalm seems, it kind of feels a bit familiar. This is kind of how a normal life in a fallen world works.

It's kind of like a roller coaster. See if this sounds familiar to you. We have a huge win, but it's followed by what seems like a big loss. As the singer said, I take two steps forward, but I take a step back.

[16:53] One moment you have clarity and everything feels great. And then the next moment, you're confused. You're relaxed on vacation, but as soon as you check your email, you're quickly anxious.

You urgently pack to get to the airport because they tell you to be there so early, only to realize once you check in, your flight is delayed and you have to wait. You feel confident that God is near, but the next thing you know, He feels distant.

This is life. And we're not in Eden anymore. But I want you to see how David responds. He says, one thing have I asked of the Lord, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord to gaze upon His beauty.

So all this is going on and David, this is how you respond? David, are you serious? You have an army encamped against you.

People who want to devour you. You've been blacklisted by those in charge. A manhunt is out for your life, yet you're talking about the beauty of the Lord.

[18:11] Am I the only one kind of shocked by that reply? I'm thinking, maybe you should think of a way to protect yourself, to defend yourself, David. Or maybe you should seek vengeance.

But no, rather your first thought is to run to the temple, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. It seems that David realizes that his greatest need is not met in the absence of conflict, but his greatest need is met in the presence of the Lord.

In times of trouble, David is teaching us that our soul's rest comes by having communion with God. That is the design.

It is the strategy for your soul. Hey, so if you're not doing well, that's the medicine. The medicine is communion with God. Matt Chandler says this, Worship isn't about getting things from God, but about getting God himself.

David models this beautifully. His longing isn't first for safety, his longing is for communion. And then one commentary says this, The New Testament then teaches that now, under the new covenant, the church of Christ, indwelt by the spirit of Christ, is the place where God is to be met on earth.

[19:37] Through the preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and corporate prayer, as such, each church gathering, if the word of God is faithfully preached, is a foreshadowing and anticipation of the new Jerusalem.

The old covenant yearning for the tabernacle or temple becomes a delight in gathering with the people of Jesus under his gospel word. So this is showing us that man's greatest need is found in communion with God and community with his people.

In difficult circumstances, we long for a home for our souls. And David's saying, this is where you find it. In case we forget, like, this is the same David that defeated Goliath, right, he has, he's experienced in adversity.

We might not face the same adversity, but we do face adversity, right? The adversity that we face seem to be the enemies of our soul.

And they're fierce and they don't stop. And unlike Goliath, we can't just chop their head off and leave them in a field. The enemies of our soul are persistent and they keep coming after us.

[20:53] They persist and they cause pain. Yet as bad as all the adversity he is facing, look at how David responds. There's a few, a few phrases that stand out here to me.

It says, number one, he will hide me. Talking about God. He will hide me. He will conceal me. He will lift me.

And then it says, he lifts my head. So I think the idea in this is that God is not passive. That God is active.

And then David responds, he says this, I will offer sacrifices in his tent with shouts of joy. I will sing and make melody. Singing might sound a little strange to many of us when we think about this response, but I think it's a very natural expression of thankfulness.

David is thankful for God's help, so he's singing. When we're happy, we tend to want to sing. If you've ever shared an office with Walt Alexander, you quickly realize that this man bursts into song at the, at a very loud decibel, and it's quite often.

[22 : 15] There's no telling what he's singing, but when he's singing it, he is singing it, if you know what I mean. You can be on the phone, the most important phone call of your life, and Walt walks by your office singing, and he's just yelling.

And it's so, it's a little annoying. But, but what I've begun to realize is that this man's got a grateful heart.

And you know what? I can get on board with that. because I think singing is the natural expression of having a thankful heart. So keep singing, Walt. Starting in verse seven, I think it might be helpful to just kind of walk through a few of these verses and comment on them a little bit because the song, the song kind of shifts from being, it moves from like praising to praying and music to crying. That's where it kind of gets sad a little bit. Verse seven and eight, it says, Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud. Be gracious to me and answer me.

Verse eight, You have said, seek my face. My heart says to you, your face, Lord, do I seek. David cries out with his voice for the Lord to answer him.

[23 : 32] David knows that if God doesn't answer, it doesn't matter who answers. But if God does answer, and God seemingly does answer and says, seek my face.

That's God's response. Seek my face. Or maybe another way to translate it would be to seek my presence. If the Lord speaks, we should listen and respond.

So David does. He responds and he says, Your face, O Lord, I will seek. Then I love David's humble response in verse nine. And asking the Lord to not hide his face from him.

Verse nine, it says, Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger. O you who have been my help, cast me not off. Forsake me not, O God of my salvation.

You know, as I was reading that, I thought about it. I was like, David has actually seen that happen before. David saw how the presence of the Lord left King Saul.

[24 : 36] And David wants to ensure that does not happen to him. David, like us, has had people in his life who were once dear and near who have left.

But not the Lord. In verse 10, this one, so tough. for my father and mother have forsaken me.

So grateful that it has not happened in my life. But he says, we see that sometimes even the most tender and trusting relationships in our lives, that of a father and mother can be broken.

many of you have lost family and friends after deciding to follow Jesus. David says that even if the most dear companions forsake you, the Lord will not forsake you.

In the Gospels, Jesus says, those who have left houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, possessions, more will be rewarded.

[25 : 51] The point seems to be that even if I, even if or when I experience rejection from the world, the Lord will take me in. He will adopt me as his son or daughter and welcome me into his family.

The family bonds that tie each believer together in Christ are stronger than any natural family connection. You might lose some people by following Jesus.

but you will get God. You might lose people but you'll get God. So friend, I want to say like if you've experienced rejection from those who you thought you could trust, if you've tried to honor the Lord yet have been forsaken, may I remind you the Lord will not forsake you.

He will take you in. Verse 11 says, teach me your way O Lord and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. I love, I love David's request to be taught of the Lord.

Here you see like a great teachable, teachableness of spirit. I remember after becoming a Christian having the thought for the first time that I wanted to think biblically.

[27 : 03] that may sound strange. Maybe you were taught that from a young age but I, it never occurred to me. I had a friend who responded, I'd shared an opinion and a friend of mine responded to me and he said, hey Ben, that's not biblical.

And I was like, oh. And I thought about it and he was right. And so I started like this process of like comparing what my thoughts were against what the Bible says is true.

So my preferences, my opinions to what the Bible has made clear and I kind of describe it as though like I needed biblical alignment.

Like when your car gets out of balance, you just, you line it up. So God asked David to teach him his ways. In verse 12 it says, give me not up to the will of my adversaries for false witnesses have

risen against me and they breathe out violence.

This hits hard. I, I hate false witnesses. Where we live, this, this seems to happen a lot more than a bunch of armies encamping against us.

[28 : 17] or trying to kill us but we live in a culture that's very quick to rise up against you. They want to cancel you for anything you say that they disagree with.

People seem quick to lie in order to tear people down. And I think deep in all of us we have this desire to be heard and to be understood.

To be viewed accurately. Yet David says that false witnesses have risen up against him. It turns out cancel culture is not a new thing. It was happening to David.

He was facing slander. Therefore David asked to be taught the ways of the Lord and for God to make his path level. I thought about how would I say that in today's terms and I thought I would say God lead me down a well lit street.

Illuminate my path. That way I can see clearly. And that seems to be what David is saying. So section one God is with you do not fear.

[29 : 23] Two God responds in times of trouble. And number three God gives grace for the future. We now arrive at two of my favorite verses of scripture.

Verses 13 and 14 and we'll read them again. It says 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. In one version in verse 13 it says I would have despaired unless I believed that I would look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

And I've thought about that line so often. I would have despaired. how many times has that verse came to my mind in my life? I've been so on the verge of despair and then I remember that.

I would have despaired unless I believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord while I'm alive in the land of the living. Maybe you need to hear that today.

[30 : 30] Sometimes rather often we have to recount the history of God's faithfulness through our lives in order to get us toward the future.

To give us courage for the future. I believe David said that God will be good in my future. David's enemies still pursued him.

Sorrow and heartache did not vanish from his life yet God was still good and David knew that he would see God's goodness again in his future.

So despite the brokenness of our world God still shows his goodness to us daily. In common ways it's in the food on our tables. The smiles of our kids the sunsets through the trees the very air that we breathe.

The world he made and called good at creation still sings of his goodness. There may no resolution to our pain in this life and there's not but God is no less God and he is no less good.

[31 : 38] God is so deeply bonded to humanity that he became one of us. Jared Wilson says this remembering God's historic faithfulness is the first step in enjoying his present faithfulness to you even if you don't feel it.

I think so often we're just so dependent upon how we feel and so we have to remember we have to recount how God has been faithful to us in our lives. So God's goodness doesn't make the pain in our lives hurt less but it does give us strength to endure.

We don't know what tomorrow holds but through it all God will remain good even as the tears fall believe in his goodness. but then we get to the last verse God calls us to wait.

He calls us to be strong for our hearts to take courage and to wait. I have to my knowledge I've never met a person who likes to wait. I've met people who are better at it than other people but no one who just thrives waiting.

You've never seen a person list their hobbies. I love hiking, long walks on the beach and waiting. Waiting is universally something people dislike.

[33 : 05] It desires, it challenges our desires for control and it leaves us feeling helpless and there's like a tension that builds up in us because we can't do anything about it because we're waiting.

One thing I've learned about waiting is that my patience in waiting is dependent upon who or what I'm waiting on. That's what decides whether it's worth it or not.

You say there's a 30 minute wait at McDonald's, no thanks. You've lost your mind. You tell me there's a 60 minute wait at my favorite restaurant, no problem, I'll wait.

The same with my wife Joy. I tend to be the one in our marriage who is 30 minutes early to everything. Well, sometimes she tends to be, shall I say, barely on time. Is that a polite way to put it? But truth is, I would rather be late due to waiting on her than early and be without her.

[34 : 10] She is worth the wait. The Lord calls us to wait on him and he is worth the wait. so what ties all this together?

What ties and unifies the psalm? What gives this psalm of trouble and hope its faith? it all points to Christ.

Beneath all the suffering, it was Jesus who cried for his father not to turn away in anger. It was Jesus who said he would not be alone even though his father and mother would forsake him. Jesus faced false witnesses intent on violence against him. it points us to the redeemer who will come to suffer injustice violence and ultimately the rejection of his father so that we might know forgiveness acceptance and hope.

It all points to Christ. And with the same idea in mind as this psalm ends with a command to wait for the Lord we look back to the beginning with a focus on who the Lord is.

[35 : 29] God says wait and we look back. It calls us to remember what we know to be true about God. That waiting on him is worth it because we look back the Lord is my light and my salvation and the stronghold of my life.

Whom shall I be afraid? So I think David would say be strong let your heart take courage and wait on the Lord. I want to end this by sharing a poem by Paul Tripp that I thought was so fitting and kind of wraps us around this psalm.

But listen to this. I am safe not because I have no trouble or because I never experience danger. I am safe not because people affirm me or my plans always work out. I am safe not because I am immune from disease or free of the potential for poverty.

I am safe not because I am protected from disappointment or separated from this fallen world. I am safe not because I am wise or strong.

[36 : 58] I am safe not because I deserve comfort or have earned my ease. I am safe not because of money or power or position or intellect or who I know or where I live.

I am safe because of the glorious mystery of grace. I am safe because of the presence of boundless love. I am safe because of divine mercy, divine wisdom, divine power, and divine grace. I am safe not because I never face danger but because you are with me in it. You have not given me a ticket out of danger. You have not promised me a life of ease.

You have chosen to place me in a fallen world. I am safe because you have given me the one thing that is the only thing that will ever keep me safe.

You have given me you. I am safe from my evil heart and this shattered world not because I can escape them both but because in the middle of temptation and trial, danger and disappointment, sickness and want, you have given me everything I need to fight temptation and avoid defeat and to point others to the safety that can be found only in you.

[38 : 28] So I will wake up tomorrow and face the anxiety of not knowing the fear of my own weakness and the reality of the fall. I will live with faith, courage, perseverance and hope and when danger comes and it will, I will whisper to my weakening heart, God, Emmanuel, Emmanuel, God with us is your shelter.

You are safe. Amen. Let's pray together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Lord, thank you that we're, we're not living this life based upon our own merits.

Thank you that we can trust you. Thank you that you are a friend and a faithful companion in times of trouble.

so we trust you and we trust Jesus with our lives. May we rest in the safety that comes from knowing that God is our light, our salvation and our stronghold.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.