

Motto Text 2022 - Psalm 27:14

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Preacher: John Winter

[0 : 00] So, Psalm 27 and our motto text, if you show the next slide, this one from the final verse, wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart, and wait for the Lord.

And so this is going to be our emphasis this year as we wait on God in prayer and wait on God for his will to be revealed for us here at Whitby Christian Fellowship at Westcliffe Church.

It's such a joy to say those two things together. And we had an experience of the Lord's blessing in the last year when we came out of lockdown and then we were able to meet in here from June, back in June, remember that?

So we've experienced summer here. Do you remember it was once warm? And we've experienced winter here, which was really freezing. And this is kind of like a mild day, an odd mild day in the middle, well, actually in early January, not the middle of January.

So this is what it'll be like most of the time. Until we improve the heating somehow. But when you reflect over the last year, I hope you can take time to thank God for his blessings.

[1 : 10] So I give you an example of how God has blessed us as a fellowship. But what about your life? What about my life? What could you close the year on and say, thank you, God, for that?

Thank you, God, for this. Thank you, God, for this person. For my home. For my health. For my family. For my children.

For my husband. For my wife. For my children. I hope we take time to thank God. God. Because God deserves our praise for all the way that he blesses us.

But sometimes he blesses us in unusual ways. In ways that don't appear at first to be a blessing. So sometimes when things go wrong, we think, this is terrible.

I couldn't imagine anything worse. But often we discover that those things, too, turn out to be a means by which God blesses us. Brings us into relationship with others.

[2 : 11] Teaches us the value of the things that we really possess. And we really long for and hope for. And teaches us to trust him. Absolutely trust him. When we have nowhere else to turn, we turn to God for his blessing.

And so the new year offers us that opportunity to reflect. To thank God for what is past. And as we prayed on New Year's Eve night in our home. To trust him for things that are to come.

I don't know if you know the hymn, How Good is the God We Adore. If not, look it up. Wonderful hymn by Joseph Haar. It has those lovely words. We praise him for all that is past.

And we trust him for all that's to come. So may God bless us as we look at this motto text now. And look forward to what is to come. By the grace of God.

Let's read Psalm 27 again. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life.

[3 : 14] Of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh. When my enemies and my foes attack me. They will stumble and fall.

Though an army besiege me. My heart will not fear. Though war break out against me. Even then I will be confident. One thing I ask of the Lord.

This is what I seek. 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 seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble.

He will keep me safe in his dwelling. He will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle. And set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me.

At his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy. I will sing and make music to the Lord. Hear my voice when I call, O Lord. Be merciful to me and answer me.

[4 : 11] My heart says of you, seek his face. Your face, Lord, I will seek. Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger.

You have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me. O God, my savior. Though my father and mother forsake me. The Lord will receive me.

Teach me your way, O Lord. Lead me in your straight path. Because of my oppressors. Do not hand me over to the desire of my foes. For false witnesses rise up against me.

Breathing out violence. I am still confident of this. I will see the goodness of the Lord. In the land of the living. Wait for the Lord.

Be strong and take heart. And wait for the Lord. Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his holy word. Now, Vanitha Rendell Risna has written a lovely book.

[5 : 09] A book that I'm reading at the moment. And it talks about the scars that have shaped me. That's its title. How God meets us in suffering. As her name suggests, she's of Indian origin.

But she lives in the United States. Was taken there as a very young girl. And is married to an American Christian there. And her story is really interesting.

Because when she was a young girl. A very young girl. She contracted polio. But she was misdiagnosed. And even though she was in India at the time. Treatments were generally good. And usually polio could be treated well. But because she was misdiagnosed. Unfortunately, she lived with widespread paralysis. And she was of a wealthy family.

And they told her father that she would really need to be taken to the West. For good medical treatment. In order to have better outcomes for her life. By the time she was age 13.

[6 : 11] She'd undergone 21 surgeries. She'd spent most of her early life in a hospital. She was in hospital around 10 years in total. Of her 13 years of early life.

In the interim periods. When she was well enough. She went to school. But she was cruelly bullied. Both verbally and physically. She was called a cripple. Regularly by her school friends.

And so life in school was not very good for her. Eventually though. She overcome some of those early setbacks. She went to college. Graduated. Married her classmate.

And things began to look up for her. However, she endured four miscarriages. Her son who was born to much joy.

Was later misdiagnosed with a heart condition. And sadly died soon after. As a result of a doctor's mistake. She was then diagnosed with post-polio syndrome.

[7 : 13] Which was a debilitating and progressive disease. Which would likely result in her becoming a quadriplegic. Her husband then betrayed her. And divorced her. Leaving her to raise her two daughters alone.

So, Vanitha began to ask where the abundant life was that God had promised for her. You can imagine she would, wouldn't you? Such suffering.

Such cruel suffering. So little hope. Where was the abundant life that Christ had promised? Where was the intimacy with God in a suffering that was so cruel.

But an intimacy that can be so breathtakingly beautiful. She begged God for his grace. For grace that would deliver her from her pain.

But she discovered that God offered her something better. His sustaining grace. The scars that shape her. But what are scars?

[8 : 23] You look in the dictionary. Scars are healed wounds. They're healed wounds. They may be ugly. You may wish they weren't there.

She used to be encouraged by a friend to uncover her legs on the beach. But she was too ashamed of her scars. She later came to value her scars.

And see that they were a reminder to her. Of God's gracious provision for her life. But she didn't get there easily. She discovered the goodness of God.

God in the darkest of days. She said, Life is full of pain. Sometimes God miraculously delivers us. When he does, we rejoice and give him glory.

He makes all things new and brings beauty from ashes. Sometimes we aren't delivered. But he gives us true contentment in our circumstances. So the world can see his peace and satisfaction.

[9 : 23] And sometimes he leaves us with a constant ache. A reminder that this world is not our home. And we are just strangers passing through. She was learning to redeem her suffering.

To understand that God has strange ways of dealing with his people. But all his ways are meant for our good. And for his glory.

It is not that she did not question or complain. The Bible, she says, is shockingly honest. And because of that, I can be honest as well. I can both complain and cry.

Knowing that God can handle anything I say. The Lord wants me to talk to him. To pour out my heart and my thoughts unedited. Because he knows them already. Every verse has a context. Every verse of scripture needs to be understood in the context in which it is written. But also in the context of our lives.

[10:28] You see the motto texts that we share each year. And the Bible promises that God gives us every day. If we read his word. Need then to be worked out in the reality of our lives.

In the reality of suffering. And trial. And difficulties. And pain and hardship. As well as in the reality of comfort. And peace. And joy. And health.

We have to work it out. We have to experience its reality. So that we understand that God is working through us. And these promises are being fulfilled in us.

And it is no different with Psalm 27. This great promise that we have taken as our motto text. Wait for the Lord. Be strong and take heart. And wait for the Lord.

Comes in a context of real suffering for David. The first half of the Psalm. Verses 1 to 6. Exudes confidence and praise.

[11:30] But the second half is a very moving prayer of lament. And lament is a cry of pain. A cry of suffering. It's kind of asking God why.

And asking God to do something. And perhaps that's how you're starting the year. You could be starting the year. In the first half of the Psalm.

So you start with praise. Or you could be starting the year. In the second half of the Psalm. Where you're experiencing suffering. And crying out to God. For his blessing.

So there is so much for us to learn here. We look at the next slide. Josh please. The first thing we want to learn. Is that the believer has protection. That you as a man or a woman.

A boy or a girl who trusts in God. You have protection. Notice verses 1 to 3. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?

[12:31] The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh. When my enemies and my foes attack me. They will stumble and fall.

Though an army besiege me. My heart will not fear. Though war break out against me. Even then I will be confident. So David is not saying.

Life is great and there are no problems. He is saying. Even in the midst of trial. And suffering. And danger. Even though my enemies. Are attacking me.

And encompassing themselves around me. Wanting to devour me. Wanting to end my life. Even then. I will be protected by almighty God.

And David has confidence in God. Because of three things. Next slide Josh please. He's confident in God. Because God is his light. He's confident in God.

[13:30] Because God is his salvation. He's confident in God. Because God is his stronghold. So believer. You need to be confident in God.

Because God is your light. And when we think of light. We can't help but think of darkness. And when we think of darkness. We remember that that's how this world began.

This world began in darkness. Darkness hovered above the surface of the earth. And into that darkness.

God spoke. Let there be light. And there was light. And throughout the Bible. Those two things contrast. Darkness is a place of emptiness.

A place of uncertainty. A place of disorder. And disorder that leads to confusion. And disorientation. And actually eventually to evil.

[14:28] Darkness is never good. But God speaks into the darkness. And creates light. And light of course leads to life. And then life.

As we experience it. Is enjoyed in light. Wicked deeds are done in dark. But the light exposes them. Jesus never calls himself.

The darkness of the world. He does call himself. The light of the world. And in his light. Says John. We see life. The light has shone in the darkness.

The darkness could not overcome it. But in Jesus. We experience. The light of God. And the light of life. We need to be confident in God.

Because God is our light. And we see. Have you ever attempted to visualize God? What happens when you attempt to visualize God? What happens to me is I see light.

[15 : 32] Because it becomes impossible to think of God in any other way. If I try to visualize God in human form. Then I realize that's unworthy of God. My conception of human beings.

Is inevitably grounded in my experience of human beings. And human beings are flawed at best. Even though I love you. I acknowledge you're flawed.

And even though you love me. You acknowledge that I am flawed. And you have never experienced a human being. Because you've never physically set your eyes on Jesus. Who is not flawed. So picturing God as a man doesn't work.

It's too limited. God is not limited. God is not limited. God is not limited. By time and space. Or any human flaws. To attempt anything is difficult. But light works.

But then even light I think. What would the light be like? The Shekinah glory of God. What would that be like? It would be overwhelming. It would be like staring at the sun.

[16 : 34] You can't do that very long without blinding yourself. So God is light. The glory of God is expressed best in light. Light that is overwhelming.

Light that cannot be looked at. Without the aid of sunglasses. You filter that light. In order to be able to bear it. And we see, Paul says, The light of the glory of God.

In the face of Jesus Christ. Because no man could look upon God and live. But we can look upon God in the face of Jesus Christ. And it is Jesus who, as our mediator, Brings us to God.

And makes God bearable for us as human beings. We need to be confident in God. Because God is light. The God who abides in light. Who wraps himself in light.

As a garment, says the psalmist. The God who turns our light into dark. Our, sorry, darkness into light. The God who makes himself known to us.

[17 : 39] In the light of Jesus Christ. So to know God is light in the context of Psalm 27. Is to affirm that even in the darkness of the terrible threat of war.

Even in the darkness of the terrible threat of human betrayal. Even in the darkness of fear. Even in the darkness of anxiety. And depression. And uncertainty.

God is there for you as your light. God is your hope in your darkness. And the thing about darkness is that everybody's experience of it is different.

When we were children, we were afraid of the dark. We needed on our night lights. Can you remember being afraid of what was under your bed at night? Even though there was nothing under your bed at night.

Well, there was, wasn't there? In your mind, there were all kinds of horrible monsters under your bed. Can you remember being afraid of the bumps at night? The creaks of the floorboards.

[18 : 40] We get more sophisticated as we get older. So our fears become different kinds of fears. The fear of that uncertain pain. Or that tightness in the chest.

Or that shortness of breath. The fear of the world around us and its evil. The darkness that encroaches and disturbs us.

What is our hope then? God is our light. God is our hope. He is our hope in the darkness. Our hope in the despair. Our hope in the anxiety.

Our hope in the depression. God is our light. We need not fear. Be confident in God. He is your light. Be confident in God. He is your salvation.

The word means to be delivered. And again, this has relevance to the context. David has been attacked by his enemies. Armies are gathering against him.

[19 : 37] Who will deliver me? David must have thought. The answer is God. God is his salvation. He is the stronghold of his life.

And whenever I think of God as our salvation. Whenever I think of him as our deliverer. It reminds me that no matter what I'm experiencing. However desperate things may be.

Physically, emotionally, spiritually, psychologically. However difficult things may be. God is my deliverer. Yes, others can help.

Doctors can help. Medication can help. People can help. But ultimately, God is my salvation. And that is certainly true of this life.

But it is especially true of the life to come. For when we breathe our last. And men can no longer help us. Who else but God can be our salvation.

[20 : 38] So be confident in God because he is your light. Be confident in God because he is your salvation. Be confident in God because he is your stronghold.

And a stronghold is a place of safety. You see, the thing about salvation is it speaks about ultimate deliverance. You know, ultimately we will be delivered.

But how will we manage in the meantime? Where shall we run to when things are really tough?

That's why we need a stronghold. In the interim, between our ultimate salvation.

When we are facing threat. When we are facing challenge. When we are facing uncertainty. God is a stronghold even there. In the midst of our suffering. He is there.

So even though there may be suffering all around us. And even in us. God is with us.

[21 : 36] To help us overcome. The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run to it and are safe. Have you experienced that?

Being in difficulties. Being in turmoil. Being in trials. There you are and you think yourself. I should really be struggling now. I should be terrified. I should be really worried.

I should be this. I should be that. And then you discover God is there. Suddenly you have a stronghold. It's almost as if you're surrounded with a new confidence.

Because you have fled for refuge to God. And have discovered him to be a stronghold. How many times have people said to you.

I don't understand you. You should be like this. But you're not. And the answer is God is your stronghold. Don't be tempted to be proud of yourself.

[22 : 33] Think well haven't I got such terrific resilience. You are what you are by the grace of God. As am I. And the fact that we stand when others fall.

Is because we have a stronghold. It's because we have a stronghold. In the midst of our trouble. Be confident in God. God is your light. God is your salvation.

God is your stronghold. Be confident. That is the believer's confidence. The next slide please.

Josh. Reminds us. Not only to be confident. Of the believer's. Protection. But also secondly. The believer's passion. Verses four to six.

One thing I ask of the Lord. This is what I seek. 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 seek him in his temple. For in the day of the trouble.

[23 : 34] He will keep me safe in his dwelling. He will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle. And set me high upon a rock. Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me.

And every time I read these verses. I think to myself. They are the verses that I have most quoted. In my Christian life. Because when I bow.

When I kneel. Before God in prayer. In my study. These are the verses I repeat. Most often. One thing I have asked of the Lord.

This is what I seek. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord. All the days of my life. To behold the beauty of the Lord. And to seek him in his temple. But then.

In my prayer. It goes on to say. Who is it that you seek? And the answer is. We seek the Lord our God. And then there is a call. Do you seek him with all your heart?

[24 : 30] Amen. And my response is. Amen. Lord have mercy. And then there is a call. Do you seek him with all your soul? And my response is. Amen. Lord have mercy. And then there is a call.

Do you seek him with all your mind? And my response is, Amen, Lord, have mercy. And then there is another call. Do you seek him with all your soul? Or all your strength, sorry.

And then my response is, Amen, Christ, have mercy. To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, King of endless glory. Now, I'm not quoting that to you to show up. I'm just showing you that it's become such a part of the fabric of my prayer.

That Christ, that God is the desire of the soul. That God is our passion. One thing I have asked of the Lord, this is what I seek.

[25 : 36] That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. If that is our passion, then God will be our chief joy and our chief aim in life.

If our passion is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, that is not speaking about heaven. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, though that's true.

That is speaking about being in the presence of God, whether for David it was tabernacle, or for Solomon it was temple, or for us it is among the people of God in church.

That is about our passion to put God first in our lives. And I want to ask you, as you think about your resolutions for 2022, would that not be a great resolution?

One thing I have asked of the Lord, this is what I seek. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to seek Him in His temple.

[26 : 42] Wouldn't that be a great resolution? This morning I was reading Acts 3 verse 20, and it has these words, that we should repent so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

And I thought to myself, yes, Lord, that would be wonderful. What a thing to focus on for the prayer meeting on Wednesday. Times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. To experience God in a new way, in a powerful way, in a real way in our lives.

Not simply to go through motions. The problem with words, learned words like my prayer, or the words of the covenant, or the words of scripture, is that if they don't tally in the heart, then they don't really resonate truth.

And God is a God of light. A God of truth. A God who looks upon the heart, and who calls us to move beyond words to action.

And that's why we call and renew our covenants. And that's why we renew the year. Because there's always that possibility of starting again.

[27 : 49] So believer, what is your passion? Yes, it's great to have God as a protector, but what about being passionate for your protector? Wouldn't that be something to challenge ourselves on in this new year?

So we've got the believer's protection. We've got the believer's passion. Next slide, Josh. We've got the believer's prayer. Notice that in verse 7 to 12. Hear my voice when I call, O Lord.

Be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, seek his face. What do we say? Your face, Lord, will I seek. My heart says of you, seek his face.

I want you to think for a moment about your heart. Okay? Your heart sometimes tells you what you ought to do. It's not talking about the physical beating thing there in the center of your chest.

It is talking about the thing that directs you, that impacts you, that motivates you, that drives you.

And sometimes, you know, and it especially happens at Christmas, doesn't it, when we're so full of Christmas turkey and Christmas pudding, and we think, boy, another packet of sweets or tin of sweets have gone, and another two glasses of wine, and we're sitting there feeling all, you know?

[29 : 07] And something inside says you ought to get up and do something, get a bit of exercise in and lose a bit of weight, yeah? And you say to your heart, you're right.

I'll have another chocolate biscuit. I'll do it tomorrow. But sometimes you've got to listen to your heart and recognize that it's telling you to do the right thing, the healthy thing, the good thing.

And the same is true in the spiritual life. It is the Elijah, what are you doing here moment, the conscience that speaks and says, you have walked away from your God.

You have become disobedient. You have become careless. You have become indifferent. You feel nothing. My heart says, Lord, I want to seek your face.

And my will says, your face, Lord, will I seek. And who's going to know that? Who's going to see that? Not me. And not anybody else.

[30 : 14] But God alone, who knows our hearts. So is your heart saying today, seek my face. Seek God's face.

And are you saying, your face, Lord, will I seek. The believer's prayer. The new year is an opportunity to say to God again, I will put you first.

I will seek your face. No matter what is happening around me. Oh, you say, well, you know, I would do this. But life is so difficult. Have you got an army encamped around you?

Did you look outside and see a great army? Have you got an enemy who is so close to you, as close as your son, in David's case, who is betraying you?

Is that happening in your life? Well, if not, perhaps it's not quite as bad as you make out. And actually, even if it is terrible, God is the answer. God is the refuge.

[31 : 12] God is the light. God is the salvation that you need in the midst of your storm. Seek his face. He is the answer to whatever ails you, whatever trials you, whatever troubles you.

And then the last thing. We have the believer's protection, the believer's passion, the believer's prayer, and the believer's persuasion.

Verse 13 and 14. Lovely verses. I am still confident of this. I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord.

Be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. Notice it doesn't say, I am confident of this. I will see the goodness of the Lord when I die. Even though that's true, that's not what he says.

What he says is, I will see God breaking through in my life while I am alive. I will not live my life in defeat. I will not live my life in despair.

[32 : 14] I will not live my life discouraged. I will live my life in victory. Because God is on my side. I will enjoy the abundant life, even in the midst of suffering.

I will not allow suffering to determine my destiny. I am confident in God that he will break through. And therefore, what should we be doing in the meantime? Well, here is your motto text. Wait on the Lord. Be strong.

Take heart. And wait on the Lord. In other words, it ain't gonna happen at the end of this service as you go out.

But it might. It ain't gonna happen when you're struggling with fear and uncertainty and doubt and despair.

[33 : 17] But it might. It ain't gonna happen when you're ill, when you're depressed, when you're dying.

But it might. God will break through if you are confident and expect him to. But if you are not confident and not expectant, it is unlikely to happen.

We need to bring ourselves to this place of saying, I will wait for the Lord. I will be strong. I will take heart.

And I will wait until he breaks through. Now that could be really, really difficult. It could be very Job-like. Even if he slay me, yet I will hope in him.

It could be against every instinct that you have. But in the midst of all of this trial and all of this suffering, you will find that God will break through if you trust him.

[34 : 28] Next slide, Josh. So I started with this lady. And that was what I quoted from her. The scars that have shaped me. Life is full of pain.

Next slide, Josh. What she discovered through her long experience of trial, of suffering, of polio, of hospitalization, hospitalization, of betrayal, of the loss of beloved children, what she discovered was that there was a secret.

This is the most precious answer God can give us, she said. Wait. It makes us cling to him rather than to an outcome.

God knows what I need. I do not. He sees the future. I cannot. His perspective is eternal. Mine is not. He will give me what is best for me when it is best for me.

Her secret? Wait. Wait on the Lord. Be strong and take heart. And wait for the Lord.

[35 : 40] Amen.