

# Psalm 27

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, do turn in your Bibles to Psalm 27, which we read a moment ago. And it's really nice to see some familiar faces, and it's nice to see some new faces.

! As we're here, it's great. Well, let's pray together and ask God for His help. And just a simple prayer from the psalmist.

Open our eyes, Heavenly Father, that we might see wonderful things in your Word, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.

Well, if any of you come and visit us in Dundee, there's a very good chance that you will get roped into a game of hide-and-seek.

And there are only two places to hide in our garden. Behind the shed, or behind the person who is counting.

[ 1 : 10 ] And the second is Jonathan's favorite place. He'll tiptoe behind you, and he'll try very hard not to laugh. And then he'll find it absolutely hilarious when you finally turn around and spot him.

And Psalm 27 is what we might call a hide-and-seek sort of psalm. Because in this psalm, David is a man who has found something, and David is a man who is seeking.

And I want to do something maybe a bit different tonight. Rather than work through this psalm from beginning to end, I want to move from the outside in. And to move from the edges of the psalm towards the center.

And if that sounds a little bit radical, don't worry. We've still got two headings. And the first is this. What David found. What David found.

And what David found in this psalm, in a nutshell, was courage, despite being surrounded by things that were very frightening.

[ 2 : 19 ] Courage, despite being surrounded by things that were very frightening. FDR is the longest-serving president in American history.

He was in the White House from 1933 to 1945. And for all his achievements, he's known just for one famous phrase. In his first inaugural address, in the midst of the Depression, he said this. Let me assert my firm belief. Maybe you know this sentence. That the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. And that sentence, it captured the imagination of so many Americans. Because they had a leader who was unafraid. And David is very similar in this psalm. There is a poise about him.

There is a sense of calm. A sense of confidence. And we see this in the way the psalm begins. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

[ 3 : 21 ] Whom shall I fear? We see the same in the final verses. I believe. I shall look. Let your heart take courage. Wait for the Lord. And yet David had every reason to be afraid.

If you move your eye from the edges of the psalm, closer slowly to the middle, you'll see some of the threats. He's surrounded by evildoers. And he has adversaries, verse 2 and verse 12. He's not just threatened physically. No, his whole reputation is being maligned, verse 12. False witnesses have risen up against him.

And so David's enemies, they are cannibalistic, verse 2. They are militaristic, verse 3. And yet he doesn't give in to fear.

And even if an army stood against him, verse 3, he says, even if the whole world declared war on David, well, he says he'll still be confident.

[ 4 : 32 ] He reminds me of Tank Man. And do you remember him? This was the nickname given to an unknown protester who, on June 5th, 1989, stood in front of a column of tanks leaving Tiananmen Square.

And the day before, the Chinese government had launched a crackdown on protesters. And this man, holding two shopping bags, he stood bravely in front of all of these tanks.

And the standoff continued until he was dragged away. And David is like that. He is bold. He is defiant.

All hell is breaking loose around him. And yet he's confident. I think that you and I, we live in a very fearful world, don't we?

There are lots of different things that we get afraid of, frightened by. And over the last few years, people have been very afraid for their health, haven't they? Or maybe we fear for our families.

[ 5 : 35 ] We're often fearful of the kind of society that children or grandchildren are growing up in. And often what we fear the most are things that are outside of our control.

And so maybe tonight you think, well, it's fine for David to say all this. He was a king. David had an army. I can't really say these words.

Is David just some kind of robot? Is David made of different stuff from people like you and me?

Well, no. Look at verse 12.

I think there's a little chink in his armor here. There's a little bit of honesty creeping in. But what does that lead David to do?

It leads him to pray. It's not that David is so sure of himself. He doesn't feel afraid. But when he does, he prays. Do you see that in verse 12?

[ 6 : 35 ] Give me not up to the will of my adversaries. David has learned to tell God his fears. I wonder, do we do that?

I think it can be very easy to do all sorts of other things. And we can think about the things that frighten us.

We can talk about them. And we can worry about them. But David prays about his fears. And second, he's learned to allow truths about God to shape, to mold those prayers.

See this in the very first verses. The psalm, you see, it doesn't start with a bang. It doesn't start with, come and have a go if you think you're hard enough. It doesn't start with, whom shall I fear?

No, like all true prayer, it starts with God. The Lord, Yahweh, the covenant God. He is my light in a dark world.

[ 7 : 42 ] He is my salvation in a sinful world. He is my stronghold in an unstable world. And David says that this security he has, it is more certain than the closest human relationships.

Do you see that in verse 10? There's no evidence in Scripture that what David describes in verse 10 happened to him. As some of the commentators suggest, it's probably best to think of it hypothetically.

But David says, even if, even if my father and mother forsake me, I have a God who will take me in. Is that how we think of God tonight? I absolutely love the film *The Fugitive*. It is Harrison Ford at his absolute finest.

Forget Indiana Jones, forget Han Solo. When he plays Dr. Richard Kimball, it is an absolute master class of acting. And in that film, he is on the run.

[ 8 : 57 ] And David's early life was just like that. He was hunted by Saul. And even after he became a king, he had all kinds of enemies.

And Jesus was exactly the same. And one of the really important things that we have to remember when we read the Psalms of David is that they are songs of a king.

And that means that they are songs of Jesus, God's ultimate king. And so much in David's life, well, it's echoed in the life of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus was steeped in these words. He would have known this psalm like the back of his hand. And one of the very best ways to understand his emotional life is to think of him reading a psalm like this.

Think of him praying these words. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a man who knew all about facing fearful situations, was someone who grasped this.

[ 10 : 05 ] And he said this when we read the Psalms. So we need to remember that it is the incarnate Son of God who has borne every human weakness in his flesh, who here pours out the heart of all humanity before God.

He stands in our place and prays for us. It is the prayer of the human nature assumed by him which comes here before God. And he writes this, it can only become our prayer because it was his prayer.

See, Jesus, he faced all sorts of threats during his life, didn't he? Jesus had so many enemies. And Herod tried to kill him as a baby.

The devil tried to stop him as his ministry began. His family questioned his decisions. The Pharisees tried to kill him.

But as he prayed these words, Jesus would have reminded himself of his security. Despite all the threats, he would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

[11:21] The author of Hebrews says that Jesus shared in our humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death.

That is the devil. And then he adds this, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

That's a really good text, isn't it, for Easter Sunday night. Slaves to the fear of death. That is our culture. That is the people that we rub shoulders with each day.

Under all our fears is the fear of death. But Jesus has conquered it. We have tonight a fearless king. And that means that we can have confidence. That's what David found. Secondly, though, in this passage, we also see what David seeks.

[12:27] What David seeks. Jennifer Roberts. She teaches art history at Harvard University. And just like every good teacher, she's always looking for a way to communicate her subject to them.

And every year she sets her students a really unusual essay assignment. They have to go to one of the galleries in Boston. They've got to write an essay on one of the paintings that they see there. But before they start typing, there's one condition. They have to stand, sit in front of that painting for three hours. And they're not allowed their phones.

It's just full immersion in the image. And when they're told that, many of them protest. How can I possibly sit in front of a painting for three hours?

Seems like wasted time. But by the end, they always enjoy it. They notice details they've never seen before. And having the time to soak in that image, it's very meaningful. And their essays are a lot more interesting as well.

[13:30] And David has that kind of perspective in the middle of the psalm. Look at verse four. One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I 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.

I absolutely love this verse. I love David's focus. He's like Mary, isn't he? Sitting at Jesus' feet. He's discovered the one thing that really matters.

He wants to be with God's people, with God. And I love how David describes the Lord. He says he wants to see the beauty of the Lord.

I wonder, is that how we think of God? We often think of God as powerful, don't we? We often think of God as mighty or strong. Do we think of God as beautiful?

In C.S. Lewis' book, *Till We Have Faces*, one of the characters writes this, the sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing to reach the mountain, to find the place where all the beauty came from, to find the place where all the beauty came from.

[14:59] And David knows the source of that beauty. He knows the source is God. He wants to be where God is. He wants to meet with God in the temple.

What do you and I want? What is our longing? What would you and I ask God to give us if we knew He would say yes?

Well, David gives his answer. David wants God Himself. Verse 8, How do you and I seek God? We seek God in prayer, don't we? We seek God when we read our Bibles for ourselves. Primarily, you and I seek God when we gather together like this.

I'm preaching to the converted, I think, tonight. But this is why Sundays are so important, aren't they? David wants increasing intimacy and closeness to God.

[16:10] David wants to be in the house of God. He wants to see the beauty of God. And David wants to see the face of God. And this is what human beings were made for.

This was life in the garden. This is what we hear in the Aaronic Blessing. The Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.

And I think one of the things that COVID has done, hasn't it, has made us realize just how important our faces are. And just how important our bodies are.

And Mark Zuckerberg, he has apparently got a metaverse coming for us. And he claims it's going to revolutionize the way that we connect with each other. We're going to walk around with glasses and

with avatars in virtual reality.

And the problem with that is it's just so dehumanizing, isn't it? And it cuts against the way God made us as embodied creatures. It cuts against the incarnation.

[17:17] And it cuts against the physical future God has in store for us to see God face to face.

You see, what do we see at the end of the Bible? We see a God who wipes away every tear from our eyes. And I've never forgotten hearing someone ask this question about that promise.

When was the last time you wiped away someone's tears? You cannot do that at a distance, can you?

You have to be able to get very, very close to someone to do that. There are probably only a handful of people in your life, in my life, that you or I could do that too. And that is what is on offer in the Christian life.

That level of intimacy with God. That is how personal God wants to be with you, with me.

[18:25] I think it's very easy for us, maybe if we've been Christians for a little while, to think God is content to just keep us at arm's length, keep us at a distance. Maybe in our human relationships we often do that, don't we?

We play safe with people. We don't want to get too close to people. But that is not the future that God has for us if we're Christians.

Like David, Jesus sought his father's face. All through his life, he poured out his heart to him. He wants us to be with him too. And God's great goal for us, God's great aim for us is to be face to face with him.

Theologians, they call this the beatific vision. The beatific vision. That is our great, our certain destiny as God's people. That now we see God with the eyes of faith.

And we see with our ears. We see God as we hear his word. But one day we will see him face to face.

[19:41] And what is even more amazing is that when, it's what John says will happen on that day. 1 John 3 verse 2. Dear friends, now we are children of God and what we will be has not yet been made known.

But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him. For we shall see him as he is. You know, maybe you need to dwell on a verse like that for a while.

Maybe you need to write it out, put it on your bathroom mirror. It is a truth that can change your life. It's a certainty that will make you persevere.

As John adds, all who have this hope in him purify themselves just as he is pure. So what is your one thing?

What do you want tonight? What if you had it, do you think, would satisfy you? David gives us his answer.

[20:43] David wants God. We're not too far away from Wimbledon. And Boris Becker has been in the news a lot recently.

But in 1994, he was very close to suicide. He'd won everything that a tennis player could dream of. He'd won Wimbledon twice. But he felt completely empty.

He said this, I had no inner peace. I was a puppet on a string. But David knows the God who satisfies.

David wants him. David doesn't want to lose his face. Do you see that in verse 9? Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger.

Don't cast me off. Hear me, O God. Answer me. I love the contrast in verses 5 and 6.

[21:42] David is, he's hiding, isn't he? And yet he's shouting. He's fearless. He's secure in God, but he's not silent. He's singing and praising and confident in God.

Is that us tonight? Do we want God? Or are we running away from God?

In The Hound of Heaven, it's a really powerful poem by Francis Thompson. It describes one man's experience of hiding away from God rather than seeking him. It goes like this, I fled him down the nights and down the days.

I fled him down the arches of the years. I fled him down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind and in the midst of tears I hid from him.

And in so many ways that captures the human condition. You and I, we have been running away from God, haven't we, since Eden. Deep down, we long for him.

[ 22 : 48 ] Even after we've come to him, we still try to satisfy that longing in all the wrong places. But only in him, only in the God who is full will you and I find what we're looking for.

And David's greater son, Jesus, he came to seek and save the lost. And while we were a long way off, while we were far away, God the Father sent him to look for us on the cross, Jesus, our beautiful Savior died and then he rose.

And so tonight, it is not that we have nothing to fear but fear itself. We have so much more than that, don't we?

we have a fearless king. We have a king who has conquered death. And we have a king who says, fear not, I am the first and the last and the living one.

I died and behold, I am alive forever more. Well, let's pray together.

[ 24 : 15 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.