

Psalm 27
Psalm 27
Matthew 6:19-34

“A Song for Seekers”

October 23, 2016

How are you at *waiting*?

Waiting can be hard work.

Especially when you think that you know what to do to fix things!

Wait for the LORD.

Of course, this *waiting* is not a passive thing.

Psalm 27 ends with the Psalmist still in the middle of his troubles.

There is confidence – there is hope –

but my situation still requires me to “be strong and courageous.”

It takes courage to *wait* on the LORD

when everything around you looks bleak.

Do you have the courage to wait for God?

If you think about the last few Psalms,

it becomes really clear that David's experience was largely one of suffering.

We sometimes think of the great heroes of the scripture

as those whose lives were characterized by this intimate relationship with God.

But if we take the Psalms seriously as our model,

then we must say that the day-to-day Christian experience

is more one of darkness than of light -

more of suffering than of joy -

more the cross than the resurrection.

Psalm 27 is a song of confidence – but it is a confidence expressed in the midst of suffering.

As such it echoes much of what we have heard in the previous Psalms.

There are echoes of Psalm 23 – “paths of righteousness” are echoed in the “level path” of v11;
the valley of the shadow of death (literally, the valley of deep darkness)

is the “day of trouble”

but my *hope* is the Lord who is my light and salvation (v1);

and one phrase is taken almost exactly from Psalm 23:

dwelling in the house of the LORD all the days of my life (v4).

And David pleads that he not experience Psalm 22 again –

“do not forsake me!” (v9)

(My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?)

The goal of Psalm 24 – ascending the hill of the LORD and standing in his holy place –
remains the goal of Psalm 27.

Psalm 25 confessed the guilt and shame of the Psalmist –
asking God to pardon my guilt and forgive all my sins –
but it ended with confidence:

“may integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you”

And that same confidence remained at the heart of Psalm 26:

David’s prayer for vindication – that God would declare him *innocent* –
so that he might dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

These themes all continue in Psalm 27.

But it’s not just the same song over and over again.

The titles I gave were designed to show the distinctiveness of each of these songs:

Psalm 25 – A Song for the Lonely

Psalm 26 – A Song for the Innocent

Psalm 27 – A Song for Seekers

Sure, you can see how each of these are connected,

but each song focuses on a different aspect of Christian experience.

And, as we keep seeing over and over,

the reason why these are different aspects of Christian experience

is because they were *first* different aspects of *Christ’s* experience.

We sing Psalm 27 because Psalm 27 was first true for Jesus.

Sing Psalm 27

Read Matthew 6:19-34

Of David.

What do you seek?

What is your quest?

What is the thing that drives you?

Or to say it another way:

What are you anxious about?

If my Facebook feed is any indication,

there is considerable anxiety about the coming election!

But that’s hardly the only thing.

You are worried about your children.

You are anxious about broken relationships with friends.

Your job situation – your chosen career – isn’t going the way you had planned.

And when you are worried about something -
when you are anxious about something -
you want to fix it.
You want to figure out how to make it right.

But into our quest to save the world and figure out how to make everything right,
Psalm 27 calls us “seek the face of God.”

Psalm 27 starts with my situation.
Who is God?
What are my circumstances?
How do I respond to my circumstances?

When you are tempted to be fearful and anxious,
I highly recommend that you take this approach.
Start with God.

1. My Situation: I Am Tempted to Be Afraid (v1-3)
a. Who Is God? My Light and My Salvation (v1)

*27 The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold^[a] of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*

Plainly in verse 1, there is a temptation to be afraid.
“whom shall I fear?...of whom shall I be afraid?”
We’ll hear more about these fears in verses 2-3 –
but for now, the focus in verse 1 is *not* on my circumstances.

Remember God!
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?

“The LORD is my light”?
The assumption is that I am in a dark place.
Even when we are talking about God –
even when we are turning our eyes to the one who *is* the light –
I cannot escape my circumstances.
Because where *I am* – it is dark.

Lots of things can make you feel alone and in the dark.
Maybe your friends aren’t acting like friends.
Maybe your marriage is going through a rough spot.

(Maybe your marriage *is* a rough spot...)
Maybe your job is miserable.
Maybe you're not sure that you are heading the right direction in life.
Doubts assail you – fear and anxiety about the future –
your future – the future of your family – the future of the country...

But in the beginning God said “Let there be light” – and there was light.
Why was light the first of God's creations?
Everything that God has made reflects *something* about him.
Light was the first of God's creations
because light is that which makes all other things possible.
Try to imagine a world without light.

What's the first thing you notice?
Well, you *don't* notice anything – because you can't *see!*
And for that matter, without light there is no heat -
and without heat there is no motion -
so our world without light isn't really a world,
it's more like a static void.

That's *why* in the beginning, God said “Let there be *light!*”
Because he has always been the light of his people.

Think of the pillar of cloud and fire that led Israel through the desert.
Think of the seven-fold lamp in the Holy of Holies –
reflecting off the golden walls –
Think of the LORD himself filling the temple in Isaiah's vision –
as the glory of the LORD shines forth –
Truly, the LORD is my light!

Or as John says (John 1:4-5)
“In him was life, and the life was the light of men.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”
Or as Jesus says (John 8:12),
“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life.”
“I have come into the world as light,
so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.” (John 12:46)

Or in Revelation – (Rev. 22:5)
“Night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun,
for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

Yes, I may currently live in the valley of deep darkness – the valley of the shadow of death –

but I fear no evil because *you* are with me (Ps 23).

The LORD is my light.

Verse 2 then deals with my circumstances:

b. What Are My Circumstances? Evildoers Assail Me (v2)
*² When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.*

While the language of verses 2-3 may sound like a military attack,
it is worth noting that verse 12 speaks of “false witnesses” - more courtroom language -
so the “evildoers” that assail me could be any sort of evildoers.

As we have so often seen, the Psalms were written to fit all sorts of circumstances,
because they were designed for the people of God in all times and places.

We saw last week that the Psalmist hates the assembly of evildoers.
And here you can see why:
they are assailing me “to eat up my flesh.”

Did you hear that?
Seriously.
Did you hear that?
“to eat up my flesh”?

Once again we see how *strange* a book the Bible is!
As far as we know, there were no cannibals in the ancient near east.
What does it mean for someone to “eat up my flesh”?
This is a very vivid description of a very common experience.

All throughout the scriptures, eating the flesh of other people
refers to devouring their livelihood –
destroying their lives –
resulting in their death.

Many of you have experienced this –
someone whose malicious words eat away at you –
or maybe you have watched someone you love
as they are worn down by ravenous wolves who are eating away at them.

You don't have to be a cannibal to eat people.

All you have to do is use your lips – your mouth –
to destroy other people.

This is why Paul will say that the “reviler” – the person who uses words to destroy –
is as bad as the murderer or the adulterer.

It starts with words –

but words lead to actions.

One person begins to speak evil against another.

If someone else agrees – and joins in the evil talk –
then gradually the assembly of evildoers grows
until they have sufficient numbers to take action!

But when evildoers assail – when slander and gossip eat into me –
even then I will not be afraid.

^c **What Is My Response? I Will Be Confident (v3)**

³ *Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet^b I will be confident.*

How can I be confident in the midst of enemies?

When you are besieged by foes – when troubles clamor around you –
why are you not afraid?

Because Jesus has sung Psalm 27 before you.

King Jesus was no exception to the afflictions of this life!

His enemies sought to devour him.

And King Jesus taught us a different way to think about victory!

Because with Jesus his adversaries did not appear to “stumble and fall.”

His adversaries devoured him – they crucified him!

But in the very jaws of defeat,

our Lord Jesus triumphed.

Because there was no way for death to hold him.

And Jesus taught us that “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,
you have no life in you.” (John 6:53)

In Psalm 26 we heard about washing hands in innocence –

and we remembered Pilate washing his hands *of* Jesus' blood,
when he should have been washing his hands *in* Jesus' blood.
Even so in Psalm 27 we hear of the evildoers seeking to eat the flesh of the Messiah –
the Anointed One!

Again, it is the right action – but in the wrong way.
We need to come to Jesus in faith – recognizing that he alone is able to feed us.

Jesus reminds us that our confidence is *not* that we will overthrow our enemies!
Our confidence is that Jesus has passed through suffering and death
and that he has been raised from the dead and seated in God's heavenly temple.
Therefore, we can seek with confidence the *one thing* that he sought as well:

2. My Meditation: One Thing I Seek (v4-6)

a That I May Gaze upon the Beauty of the LORD (v4)

⁴ *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^[c] in his temple.*

Why am I confident?
Because I only want one thing.

One thing.

What do I seek from God?
Wealth? Influence? Power?
No.

I want to dwell in the house of the LORD.
I want to gaze on the beauty of the LORD.
I want to inquire in his temple.

That may sound like three things,
but those who believe in a Triune God should have no difficulty
seeing how three things can be one thing!
Because if you dwell in the house of the LORD
then you are in the place where you can gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and inquire in his temple.

When you are surrounded by foes –
when you are besieged by the clamor of voices that seek to draw you away from Jesus,
then there is only *one thing* that you need.

When your friends aren't acting like friends –
the *one thing* you need is to see the beauty of the LORD.
Our culture had turned beauty into something sexual.
That's backwards.
Beauty is supposed to be the "big" category.
Sexual attraction is a small subset of beauty.

I want to gaze on the beauty of the LORD –
not just catch a brief glimpse,
but to bask in the vision of God's beauty!

When we see the beauty of the Lord,
then we begin to see how all created beauty points to him!

Our Lord Jesus set the pattern for us.
He is the one who lived every day of his life
gazing on the beauty of his Father – dwelling in the house of the Lord.
And the venerable Bede said it well in the 8th century:
"Let us follow the path of his human way of life
if we take delight in looking on the glory of his divinity,
if we want to dwell in his eternal home in heaven all the days of our lives,
if it delights us to see the Lord's will
and to be shielded by his holy temple." (207)

Do you want to see the LORD?
Do you want to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD?

Notice how David connects gazing upon God's beauty
with inquiring in his temple.

What does it mean to inquire in God's temple?
It means to ask God what he wants.
In the OT, it meant coming to the priests and asking what the Law says.
Or going to one of the prophets and asking what God would have you do.

Seeing the glory of God – seeing the beauty of the LORD –
cannot be divorced from *doing* what God says.
If you are seeking after God,
but you don't want to *do what God says*,
then your seeking is just a game.
That's why Jesus says,
"Seek first the kingdom of God *and his righteousness* –

and all these things will be added to you.”
If you are not interested in *doing* what God says,
then you are not inquiring of the Lord –
and indeed, you are not seeking the beauty of the Lord.

Or to use the words of Paul, “that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection,
and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,
that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil 3:10-11)

And again, in verse 5, we hear the confidence of the Psalmist in his quest:

b. Because He Will Hide Me in His Shelter (v5)

⁵ *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.*

The shelter and the tent are both rather flimsy nomadic residences.
But this language of hiding and concealing
is contrasted at the end of the verse with being lifted high upon a rock.
Yes, for now I am taking shelter in a flimsy tent –
but it is my God who conceals me!
And he will exalt me openly and clearly in the end!

I do not fear my enemies – because I *know* that God will protect me.
And in verse 6, we hear the result of this:

c. So I Will Be Exalted and I Will Worship (v6)

⁶ *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 make melody to the LORD.*

Certainly this was first true of Jesus.
He is the one whose head was lifted up –
he is the one who offered the one and perfect sacrifice to the Father.
But because it is true of Jesus,
therefore it is also true for us
who lift up our sacrifice of praise to the Lord.

We come into the heavenly Holy of Holies and sing and make melody to the LORD
with shouts of joy.

Indeed, that is where we are *right now*.

We are not just gathered here on earth in this assembly in Granger.
We are gathered with the heavenly hosts in the heavenly assembly
in the Holy of Holies.

As we saw last week from Hebrews 12 –

“you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God,
the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,
and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,
and to God, the judge of all,
and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,
and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant,
and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word
than the blood of Abel.” (12:22-24)

Truly God has lifted up my head above my enemies!

What enemies do you face?

What trials and tribulations are you afraid of?

If God has raised Jesus from the dead –

then he has raised up all those who trust in him!

3. My Prayer: Seeking the One Thing (v7-12)

In verses 7-12, we turn from meditation to prayer.

In verses 4-6, David was meditating on the *one thing* that he wanted.

Meditation is where we reflect on God and his word.

It is similar to prayer – but meditation is not addressed to God.

Meditation is where we think about who God is, who we are,
and what that means for our circumstances.

Prayer is where we then turn to speak to God himself.

Meditation can be a good preparation for prayer.

After all, we are so distracted by other voices,
that sometimes our prayers become misdirected.

Our hearts are drawn after so many things!

And our prayers are so disjointed –

we are so quick to pour out to God our shopping list of things.

Why is David confident before God?

Because he only wants one thing!

If you would be confident in prayer –

then learn how to pray *for one thing*.

Because when you learn to pray for *one thing*,
then you begin to see how *everything else* fits into that *one thing*.

a. Hear Me – Because I Am Simply Doing What You Told Me to Do (v7-8)

Notice what David’s meditation has done.

He has said that there is *one thing* that he seeks –
“that I may dwell in the house of the LORD...
that I may gaze upon the beauty of the LORD...”

Now as he turns in prayer to the LORD,
he returns to that *one thing*.

⁷ *Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!*

⁸ *You have said, “Seek^[d] my face.”*

*My heart says to you,
“Your face, LORD, do I seek.”*

As the ESV footnote points out in verse 8,
the command is a plural command (you plural) –
All of you are called to seek God’s face.

This is the *one thing* that you must seek.

This is what Jesus meant when he said that the Gentiles seek “all these things” –
but you are to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

If you are seeking God’s face – God’s kingdom – God’s temple –
then “all these things” will be added to you.

David wants to be rescued from his enemies.

David wants God’s protection.

But he understands that he cannot obtain what he wants by seeking what he wants.

Do you understand that?

You cannot get all the things you want by seeking what you want!
After all, God did not make you for all those things.
He made you for himself.

And it is only when you seek *him* that your life is properly aligned
with what you were made for.

Of course, if you seek God as a *means* to getting what you *really* want,
then you are not truly seeking God.

And this is where you run up against your worst enemy.
Your worst enemy is yourself.
Because if we are honest with God and with ourselves,
we have not sought first God's kingdom.
We have too often prayed as those who are trying to obtain *other things*
rather than seeking the face of God above all things!

And that is why David's prayer turns the way it does in verses 9-10

***b.* Do Not Forsake Me – You Are My Only Help (v9-10)**

⁹ *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!*
¹⁰ *For my father and my mother have forsaken me,
but the LORD will take me in.*

Verse 9 points to how we have fallen short.

“Turn not your servant away in anger.”
Why would God be angry?
Because we have fallen short -
we have not sought first his kingdom all the time!

As Arnobius paraphrases this,

“I have done such things by which you, rightly angered,
have turned away from me,
having been justly angered by my desires,
but be my merciful helper,
do not turn away from me or look down on me, God of my salvation.” (p208)

But while I have fallen short,

I still know that God is faithful.
My father and my mother may forsake me -
but the LORD will take me in.

We come with confidence because you are the “God of my salvation.”

And we come to God seeking *him* – seeking *his face* –
because we know that he alone can save us.

But even as our gazing on the beauty of the Lord
is connected to inquiring of the Lord in his temple,
so also our prayer includes a prayer for asking him to teach us his ways:

c. **Teach Me – Lead Me – Do Not Surrender Me to Them (v11-12)**

¹¹ *Teach me your way, O LORD,
and lead me on a level path
because of my enemies.*

¹² *Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they breathe out violence.*

In Psalm 25 we heard the Psalmist pray

“Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths”

and Psalm 26 concluded

“My foot stands on level ground.”

Here the Psalmist prays that God would teach him the right way -
and lead him on a level path.

When Jesus says “seek first the kingdom of God *and his righteousness*”
that second part - “and his righteousness” - is what the Psalmist means by
“teach me your way.”

If I am seeking God's face – if I desire to dwell in his house –
then I must also desire to know the way that I should live.

This is why I inquire in the temple.

I want to know what God says.

And if you think about how the Psalmist says this,

it's really *not* about getting personal guidance for my unique situation.

It's about learning to walk *God's* way

(in the OT, it would be hearing the priests teaching the Law in the temple;

in the NT, it is hearing your pastor teaching the scriptures week-by-week).

If you want to know God's ways, then you need to know the scriptures!

After praying, the Psalmist turns back to us:

4. **My Confidence: Wait for the LORD – He Will Do It (v13-14)**

¹³ *I believe that I shall look^{LU} upon the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living!*

My confidence is in God.

He has promised that he will do good to me –

and so I believe that he will do what has promised!

This is what our Lord Jesus says to us.

He is the one who passed through death and judgment
to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!
And because Jesus has been raised up to eternal life,
he now says to us:

*¹⁴ Wait for the LORD;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the LORD!*

Be strong and courageous -
that was the theme for Joshua in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua,
as he led Israel into the promised land.
And now it is the theme for Jesus – the new Joshua –
as he leads us into the new creation.

Be strong, and let your heart take courage.
Wait for the Lord.

My oops: TH 267 as final hymn after LS...