

Psalms/Songs of our Lives: Psalm 27
"God 'n' Me Against the World"
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July 15, 2018

Gospel : John 3: 16-21 NIV

¹⁶For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

Psalm 27

¹The 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?

²When the wicked advance against me
to devour^[a] me,

it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.

³Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.

⁴One thing I ask from the LORD,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.

⁵For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;

he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.

⁶Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the LORD.

⁷Hear my voice when I call, LORD;
be merciful to me and answer me.

⁸My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, LORD, I will seek.

⁹Do 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,
God my Savior.

¹⁰Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me.

¹¹Teach me your way, LORD;
lead me in a straight path
because of my oppressors.

¹²Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes,
for false witnesses rise up against me,
spouting malicious accusations.

¹³I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.

Fear...what strikes fear in your heart?

In the classic animated special, A Charlie Brown Christmas, Charlie engages with Lucy at her psychiatry booth, where the following conversation takes place. (<https://www.quotes.net/mquote/16643>)

Lucy Van Pelt:

Are you afraid of responsibility? If you are, then you have hypengyophobia.

Charlie Brown:

I don't think that's quite it.

Lucy Van Pelt:

How about cats? If you're afraid of cats, you have ailurophasia.

Charlie Brown:

Well, sort of, but I'm not sure.

Lucy Van Pelt:

Are you afraid of staircases? If you are, then you have climacaphobia. Maybe you have thalassophobia. This is fear of the ocean, or gephyrobia, which is the fear of crossing bridges. Or maybe you have pantophobia. Do you think you have pantophobia?

Charlie Brown:

What's pantophobia?

Lucy Van Pelt:

The fear of everything.

Charlie Brown:

THAT'S IT.

We laugh because if we don't, we'd probably cry. Fear is real. One reason I love the Psalms is that they are so contemporary! They reflect reality: Real people. Real life. Real trouble. Real fear. Real faith.

Recently the world witnessed an incredible drama as twelve Thai soccer players and their coach went missing in a series of caves in Thailand. Missing for nine days before they were located alive and safe, it was another nine days before all of them were brought out to safety. None of us will ever know all that transpired in their young lives during that time. No doubt they experienced many fears...

Fear of the dark...fear of never seeing their parents again...fear of the water as it rose in the cave, stranding them on a narrow outcropping of rock.

Once found, no doubt their hopes soared! But no doubt many new fears arose! How to bring them out: most of the boys did not know how to swim, let alone scuba dive. All of them were weakened for lack of food.

The weather threatened more rain. Even with pumping water out of the caves, which helped, they still had to navigate narrow water-filled passages which took approximately 6 hours one way.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2018/jul/03/thailand-cave-rescue-where-were-the-boys-found-and-how-can-they-be-rescued>

If one were a parent whose child was among them, I imagine the fear of never seeing one's child alive again would be paramount. And if the child survives, will they be injured—wounded—in body, mind or spirit? Some of these fears may yet play out, in addition to the fear of becoming separated again, and so on.

Fears of all kinds—rational and irrational—affect our lives. This Psalm/song is attributed to King David, who had countless occasions to fear: as a young shepherd boy protecting his flock there were always predators seeking to kill his sheep, and well able to do harm to the shepherd as well. As a teenager, David had a face-off the gargantuan Philistine, Goliath. Later King Saul made numerous attempts on David's life, and then as King, David and his troops faced numerous enemies and armies in battle.

In the midst of these events, David reflects in this psalm on fear and faith. Fear is described, along with at least two responses to it. The author begins with two statements and two rhetorical questions, in what is known as Hebrew parallelism, a common literary device:

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?

If in fact, God's character is as described, there is no reason to fear. God is utterly trustworthy. Nothing can induce fear! Absolutely nothing!

God is my light...this is the one and only time in the OT that Yahweh is described as "light". In the creation story, the *first thing God calls into being is light!* Psalm 119: God's word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. God and God's word are synonymous with light and all that enlightens and reveals.

Yahweh is my "salvation", which is always associated with life. In the OT the first mention of "salvation" is in Exodus, when the people of Israel come to know and experience Jehovah/Yahweh as their deliverer from the oppression of Pharaoh in Egypt, during the Exodus.

Having crossed the Red Sea on dry land, the Israelites sing a song, the lyrics of which are recorded in Exodus 15.

“The LORD is my strength and my defense;
he has become my salvation.
He is my God, and I will praise him...”

In the New Testament, we as Christians have also experienced deliverance. Our salvation is found in Jesus Christ who delivers us from the power of sin and death. Not only is Jesus our Savior, but Christ is also the Light of the world. John’s gospel reminds us that in the presence of this light, all shall be revealed. We can be confident before God if we are “in Christ”, for God will see Christ’s sinless perfection, not our thoughts and deeds which we would rather remain hidden in the dark.

For these Thai boys and their coach, salvation meant not only being found, but being rescued from what would have surely become a watery grave. That they survived wholly and completely with a minimum of obvious wounds, is indeed a miracle!

“Stronghold”, means ‘refuge or defense’. In spite of threats from without, the psalmist invites us into a place of refuge, a sanctuary, a place where God is present. Wherever God’s presence can be known—be that in a cathedral of stone or a cathedral of nature—anywhere --we can experience renewal of faith, hope and confidence.

First and last, this psalm is an expression of trust in Yahweh!

A shift takes place in the middle of psalm. Like bookends, at the beginning (v. 1-6) and at the end (v. 13-14) the author expresses deep faith and confidence in God who has come through in the past, and who will again.

However, what are we to make of the part in between, v. 7-12?

⁷Hear my voice when I call, LORD;
be merciful to me and answer me.
⁸My heart says of you, “Seek his face!”
Your face, LORD, I will seek.
⁹Do 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,
God my Savior.

¹⁰Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me.

¹¹Teach me your way, LORD;
lead me in a straight path
because of my oppressors.

¹²Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes,
for false witnesses rise up against me,
spouting malicious accusations.

David was a real person with real reasons to fear, and with real reasons for confidence in God. David possessed a deep and abiding faith. But he was not unlike us...he had occasions when his faith waivered or waffled.

When he fears rejection of those closest to him...
When his oppressors and foes are breathing down his neck in pursuit...
When he's the victim of malicious accusations and false witnesses...
These are occasions when David or anyone of us could easily feel less than confident.

In the moments when he lacks confidence and might be tempted to throw in the proverbial towel and give up, what does David do? He prays. He "seeks" the face of Yahweh—for reassurance. He deeply desires close personal presence of his God. The troubles are real and are not going to go away anytime soon, so what could be better than to know and experience God's presence in the midst of the storm? These verses in the middle of the psalm are a prayer! In other words, David does not resort to panic, but to prayer!

In the moment of stress, the moment of crisis, what is your default?

Do you default to panic? Or to prayer?

After nine days missing, the Thai boys soccer team and coach are located more than two miles into the underground caves. Locating them was a miracle, implementing a plan and extracating them took another nine days and the expertise of countless international rescuers, divers, doctors and so on.

I found this fact quite remarkable: On June 30th, three days *before* the boys were located alive, rescuers began conducting practice drills to evacuate survivors. This was an act of faith when there was no reason to believe there would be survivors—and that, because of the rains, the rising water inside the cave, plus lack of food and drinking water the hikers had experienced.

In spite of evidence to the contrary, they conducted practice drills so they would be prepared and ready when the call came. They rehearsed. They prepared. They practiced.

I wonder if that is not what the Psalmist is doing in this prayer: rehearsing God's faithfulness in the past, gives him hope for facing the present troubles with faith not fear, with prayer not panic.

So let me ask again: What are you afraid of?

Spiders, the dark, heights, closed in spaces, wild animals, a violence? Besides fearing death, these figure among the most common human fears, along with swimming in the ocean, flying, and going to the dentist. However in several surveys of common fears, consistently, the number one fear is speaking in public. (That does not scare me!! what scares me is whether or not anyone will listen! LOL)

In the end, the psalmist concludes:

¹³I remain confident of this:

I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait for the LORD;

be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.

Confident trust along with Yahweh's track record, informs the author of this Psalm that *the rewards of faithful discipleship will be ours in this day to day life—not just as a future, heavenly reward! We can and shall experience the presence of almighty God now—today—moment by moment as we walk in faith.*

The final verse is one which finds expression elsewhere in the OT:

"Be strong and take heart" are the same words said by God and Moses to Joshua before leading Israel into battle (Duet. 31:7, 23, Joshua 1:6,7,9,18), and again by Joshua himself to encourage Israel when facing the enemy (Joshua 10:25). David used these words to strengthen Solomon when he was assuming leadership as king (I Chronicles 22:13, 28:20).

In other words, this is an expression of preparation for action. Too often we find action preferable to waiting! Like Saul, we would rather take matters into our own hands and face the enemy boldly in our own strength rather than wait for God. (I Samuel 13:1-15)

Waiting on God is hard work. It is not easy. However, God's power is made perfect in our weakness.

God can work when we allow God to...but whenever we rush frantically about trying to "do it" on our own, we in effect become "functional atheists", denying by our actions that God is active in our lives. (p. 491, Gerald H. Wilson, NIV Application Commentary, Psalms vol 1)

Waiting for God to act is an act of deepest trust, relying on the reality that Light will NOT be overcome by the dark, but will be vanquished by it; that Life will NOT be overcome by death, but Christ has conquered it!

The lesson of this psalm?

Don't panic, pray.

Don't be fearful, be faithful.

Wait for the LORD. The LORD will not only show up, the LORD will show up and take action on our behalf!

God is worth waiting for.

That is enough.

LET US PRAY.