

Psalm 27

Good morning!

I'll pray as we start. Father God, we thank you for your word, that through it you meet with us and enable us to know you. I pray that you would use my words now to help us all to know and love you better, and to bring glory to you. Amen.

I wonder what you do when you find yourself in a tricky situation, when hard times come your way. Do you panic? Do you ignore the problem and hope it goes away? Do you immediately start planning how you're going to get yourself out of it?

Our passage today shows another reaction to troubled times, that of complete confidence in God and desire to be with God. It's a great example and we're going to be working through it over the next 20 minutes or so.

For a bit of context, this Psalm was written by David, an early king of Israel around 3,000 years ago. He was a king chosen by God to lead God's people and to show them something of what God is like.

He had a particularly close relationship with God, and this exhibits itself in his confidence in God.

That's our first point, **Confidence in the Lord**.

As we look at this Psalm, the very first thing that hits us is David's confidence in the Lord. It opens strongly – *'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?'* From the outset, David states his position – the Lord is strong enough and good enough to protect David and to uphold him,

We're not told precisely what situation David was in when he wrote this Psalm – from this verse alone, you might think he was in a position of triumph, of victory – he's full of confidence, proclaiming God's strength and his care. But as we read further, we start to get a somewhat different picture – verses 2 and 6 mention enemies, armies besieging him, and verse 12, we hear of people making malicious accusations against him.

It certainly gives the impression, even if it doesn't state it outright, that at the time David was going through some really hard times – it's likely that the army mentioned verse 3 was a literal army advancing against him and besieging him. We certainly know that David was well experienced in being badly treated, and in having powerful enemies! In the books of first and second Samuel, we hear of David fighting bears and lions in his youth, of facing the giant Goliath armed only with a sling. We hear how Saul, the king of Israel, mobilised his army to hunt David down, forcing him to hide in a cave in the mountains. We hear how David's own son, Absalom, spread lies about David to discredit him, then led the people in open rebellion against him, again forcing him to flee.

So, whilst we don't know exactly when the Psalm was written, we can be confident that David knew how it felt to be attacked, maligned and endangered.

But in verses 1-3, we see this amazing confidence in the Lord. See how David describes him in verse 1. *The Lord is my light* – light here being a reference to God's goodness, the way he exposes and drives out darkness and evil. *The Lord is my salvation* - he saves David from the distresses of life that David will later elaborate on. *The Lord is my stronghold* – he protects David, and keeps him safe.

But more than just being light, salvation and a stronghold, see how David describes him – **my** light, **my** salvation, **my** stronghold. David's confidence in God is based in objective fact, but more than that it's based on personal experience and relationship with him.

David was supremely confident in God's goodness and strength, because he knew God, he knew God's promises to him. He'd had lived experience of God's salvation and protection – he could look back on previous times in his life when he'd seen God at work in his life. And he could look at God's promises to his people, and to David specifically, to know that he would save his people.

Fairly recently, I've attempted a bit of DIY at home – not really my forte, so I got a friend round to help me out. My most recent job was trying to attach an awning to the back of the house to keep the sun off. Obviously, it had to be installed a little way up, so I needed to use a ladder. Now, to be honest, I don't really like ladders – heights aren't massively my thing either! But, I could be confident. From experience, I knew that the fact was the ladder was solid and wouldn't break under me. And I knew my friend, that he was strong and reliable – he would support the ladder so that it wouldn't slip. So despite the fact that being up a ladder wasn't a very happy place for me, I could climb up with confidence because I knew that the ladder was solid, that my friend wouldn't let me slip.

Similarly, David knew for a fact that God is strong, and he knew God personally, he knew that God loved him and cared for him, and had full confidence in him. Despite whatever hardship he was going through, David trusted God.

This is a really remarkable level of trust and confidence – sometimes it's hard to trust God, especially when we're experiencing troubled times. But we can have this confidence too! David knew everything God had done to love, rescue and care for his people up to that point, and that gave him confidence that God is good and that God loved him. But we have even more knowledge of what God has done for us – we know how Jesus died for us on the cross, the ultimate sign of God's power and love for us – we have every reason to have this level of confidence and security in God whatever our circumstance!

There is a challenge in this for us as well; when we're scared or troubled, how do we react? When times get hard, do we respond by saying, 'God, whatever happens, I trust that you are good and kind and loving, and that you will bring about the best thing for me through this'? Or do we say, as I personally find more common, 'God, you need to get me out of this now!'

David's confidence is remarkable, and worth emulating!

He had confidence in the Lord's faithfulness during troubled times, but notice that his main desire isn't for God's protection or that he'd bring the troubles to an end. Let's read verses 4-6:

'One 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. For 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. Then 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.'

David's desire here was for his relationship with the Lord above all else. That's our second point, **Seeking the Lord.**

As we've seen, it's very likely that David is thinking of a real occasion of extreme hardship, of war and enmity. And that makes his request in verse 4 all the more striking – *'that I may dwell in the house of the Lord'*, and to *'gaze on the beauty of the Lord'*. Above all else, David wants God.

The house of the Lord here probably refers to the tabernacle, the tent where God was especially present – it was a precursor to the temple in Jerusalem that was built by David's son Solomon. But more than just wishing to be physically in the house of the Lord, David desires to be in God's presence, with God, so he can gaze on his beauty.

It's a really lovely picture of the relationship he has with the Lord – he just wants to be with him. He dearly loved God, and just wanted to be near him. Yes, he knew that being in God's presence would keep him safe and offer protection (that's in v5), but that's not what he's after – he just wants to be with his father.

In recent months, I imagine that many of us will have been separated from loved ones, which can be a very painful experience – being apart from those who are special to us is hard. We long to see them, not for what we'll get from them, or what they'll do for us, but simply because we love them. Separation is hard, and we long to be with each other, just to spend time together and enjoy each other's company.

Relationship is far more than being about what someone gives, and David demonstrates that really well here. He just wants to be with God, to know God and to love him. Protection, safety and comfort are all way down the priority list. What matters is knowing God and being with him.

Ultimately, David, along with all of God's people, will experience this perfect relationship with God in heaven, when we will live with him forever. The confidence that David expresses is the confidence that God will bring him home to heaven in the end, to live with him and to be near him. He can't say for certain that God will bring him military victory, but he can be utterly sure that God will bring him safely home to him.

We, too, can share that confidence.

These last few months have been scary, painful and uncertain for many of us, and they continue to be so – we don't know what will happen in the short-term future. The pandemic continues, and we don't know when it will end, or what life will look like when it does. It's easy to worry, or despair. But while we don't know what the short-term future holds, we can have utter confidence in the long-term future. We, like David, can look forward to an eternity with our Lord in heaven, and nothing that is thrown at us can shake that!

But there is challenge here too - It is very easy to slip into wanting God for what he gives us, not for who he is – often we can see this in our prayers. Are our prayers mostly focussed on ourselves, asking God for things, or are they focussed on spending time with God, praising him for who he is, appreciating his goodness?

It's easy to lose sight on how wonderful the relationship we have with God is, but like David, we should delight in him in any and every situation.

David knows that his relationship with God is by far the most important thing in his life, far more than his own safety or comfort. And this value comes in part from the fact that it is undeserved.

Whilst David has utter confidence in God, but he recognises that this confidence is only in God's goodness, not David's own personal merit. God's salvation and protection isn't because David is such

a great guy, and it's not because he owes David anything. David knows that he doesn't deserve anything from God, but has confidence nonetheless.

That's our third point, **Knowing our need**.

Let's read verses 7-10. *'Hear my voice when I call, Lord; be merciful to me and answer me. My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!'. Your heart, 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, God my Saviour. Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me.*

These verses show David pleading with God, asking him to be with him, and to support him. It might seem that David's confidence has taken a knock – the Psalm opened so strongly with such confidence, this seems to be a bit of a backwards step.

But there's more to it than a crisis of confidence – looking at verse 10 we see that David is still standing firm in his faith, knowing that even if his closest family were to abandon him, God still wouldn't leave him. Instead, these verses show that David knows God, and knows himself – he knows that he doesn't deserve this relationship with God, that God doesn't owe him anything. In verse 7, he asks for God's mercy, that God will graciously help him despite his not deserving it.

He's not asking these things of God because there's a real risk that God might abandon him, or turn him away in anger, but to express his dependence on God, to demonstrate his utter need for God's help.

Whilst he's confident in God's salvation and protection, he's not taking it for granted.

My wife and I like to go out for walks fairly often, although sometimes the children need a little motivation! One of our favourite walks is from Ore over to the Fire Hills, and occasionally, if the kids need a bit of extra incentive, we'll tell them we'll buy them an ice cream from the van up there. So we walk over through the country park. When we get there, the kids could say, 'You told me I could have an ice cream so you have to buy me one!'. Or they could say, 'Daddy, please may we have an ice cream?'. More commonly, it's somewhere in between these two!

There's a big difference, isn't there – one expresses dependence and love, and one expresses a degree of self-centredness, and taking a promise for granted.

David here knows he needs help, he needs God's mercy. He's aware that God has a right to be angry with him because of his sin, he knows he needs to learn God's ways, and needs his help to walk in a straight path, living God's way. And he expresses his need and dependence.

This pleading with God isn't at odds with his confidence. But it does make his God's faithfulness to David even more remarkable – it's faithfulness that's completely undeserved.

It's the same for us – we are no less sinful or more deserving than David. In fact, we're told that David had a heart like the Lord's – he was particularly close to God. And if he needed to approach God with humility and dependence, then how much more do we!

It's all too easy to be blasé with God, to take him for granted, and take his faithfulness to us lightly. It's easy to ignore our sin, and to assume we can come to him on our own terms. But here, we see an example of true humility and dependence on God – David is utterly confident in God's goodness, but acutely aware of his need for God's mercy and forgiveness. It's an approach that we should copy – our relationship with God, and our confidence in him will only be strengthened by an increasing knowledge of our own shortcomings, and his wonderful love and salvation despite these.

David closes the Psalm by reiterating the confidence he has in God, that he will see the goodness of the Lord, even while he still lives. He is entirely sure of God's love and kindness.

He ends with verse 14, an exhortation to the hearer to keep going, to keep trusting, and to stand firm until we see God in heaven.

Let's close with the words of verse 13 and 14.

I remain 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.