



Psalm 27 - Triumphant Song of Confidence

Of David.

Introduction

In singing Psalm 27, God's people have a way of not simply expressing confidence in him but of cultivating that confidence for the widest range of challenging life situations. The psalm uses several synonyms for enemies, giving it the concrete setting of a faithful person beset by those who would destroy him with bloodthirsty and deceitful means; one who can trust God in those circumstances can trust him in other situations as well.

Psalm 27:1-3 - Whom Shall I Fear?

The terms fear and be afraid contrast with 'be confident': the faithful must learn to base their confidence on God's ever-present protection, i.e. his light, salvation, and stronghold; this will be a confidence that grows through experiences of deliverance, as v.2 recounts.

- 1 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?

Psalm 27:1

The Lord is my light and my salvation. Like many psalms, King David wrote this from a season of trouble. Yet it is a song of confidence and triumph, because David was not in darkness or ultimate peril as the Lord was his light and salvation. God himself brought light to David's life. He did not despair in darkness and all that it represented. His life was filled with the Lord, and his life was filled with light.

Although God is often associated with light in the Bible, this verse is the only direct application of the name light to God in the OT. Jesus is also specifically referred to as light: <<*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world*>> (John 1:5-9). Light and salvation were wonderfully promised to the Gentiles through the person and work of the Messiah: <<*And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honoured in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength – he says, ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth’*>> (Isaiah 49:6), which is repeated in Acts 13:47.

The Lord is the stronghold of my life. David was a skilled, experienced warrior and must have been a man of impressive physical strength. Nevertheless, he looked to the Lord as the strength of his life. David knew something of what the apostle Paul would write many years later: <<*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power*>> (Ephesians 6:10). If one rarely knows what it is to let God be the strength of one’s life, perhaps it is because one trusts in so many other things for strength. One might find it easy to trust in one’s wisdom, one’s experience, one’s friends, and one’s resources. David knew a strength greater than all of these things.

Whom shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid? David used the poetic tool of repetition to make his point and bring together parallel ideas. Because God was his light, his salvation, and his strength there was really no reason to fear or be afraid.

2 When evildoers assail me
 to devour my flesh –
 my adversaries and foes –
 they shall stumble and fall.

Psalm 27:2

When evildoers assail me they shall stumble and fall. David remembered how God had proven himself reliable in the past. There were times when the wicked or even an army came against him, yet God still showed that he was David’s light, his salvation, and his strength. David’s confidence in God was battle tested. He did not have fair weather faith that lived in always easy circumstances. This is not the joy of a man in a comfortable monastery; this is the song of a man who knew God’s

goodness even in danger and despair. Goliath told the young David: *<<Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field>>* (1 Samuel 17:44b); perhaps he had this kind of threat in mind when he wrote these words.

To devour my flesh. The picture here is probably of evildoers as wild animals who would devour the faithful, as confirmed by 14:4 and Micah 3:3. For similar expressions see Psalm 7:2, 10:9, 17:12, 22:13, and 22:21 for a comparison.

³ Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war rise up against me,
yet I will be confident.

Psalm 27:3

Though an army encamp against me, yet I will be confident. Because of his confidence in the Lord, the psalmist is not afraid. In his inner being there is no fear. This confident confession in God's saving love is similar to Paul's own confession: *<<What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord>>* (Romans 8:31-39).

Psalm 27:4-6 - Shelter in His Sanctuary

References to house of the Lord, the temple, a tent, and sacrifices show that these verses focus on public worship; they view unhindered access to God's presence in worship as the best of all gifts. This is the place of true delight and true safety.

⁴ One thing I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:

to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.

Psalm 27:4

One thing I asked of the Lord. The tone of the song suddenly changes from celebration to contemplation. The experience of the goodness and greatness of God made David think about how wonderful it is to seek him and to experience his presence.

David, the author of this psalm, could have called the tabernacle both a house, as in Joshua 6:24, 1 Samuel 1:7 and 3:15, and a temple, as referenced in 1 Samuel 1:9 and 3:3.

To live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. David wished he could live in the tabernacle itself, surrounded every day by the presence and beauty of God. Refer also to Psalm 23:6.

To behold the beauty of the Lord. David knew there was beauty in the nature and presence of God, beauty that could be perceived by the seeking eye of faith. He could think of no greater occupation than to fill his mind and heart with the goodness and greatness of God. God's beauty is what the faithful yearn to behold, i.e. to gaze upon with admiration and affection, as they seek him in worship.

There is richness in God, revealed to the seeking heart, that many people never know. It is a shame that David would know this under the old covenant, and that so many people today, with a greater covenant and greater promises, would never know it. Alexander Pope, a famous writer, once wrote: "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; the proper study of mankind is man." But an even more famous writer, Charles Spurgeon, responded to Pope's statement: "It has been said by some one that 'the proper study of mankind is man.' I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father."

And to inquire in his temple. In God's presence, David wished to go from contemplation to inquiry. He wanted to know more of God and more of his ways.

- 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 set me high on a rock.
- 6 Now my head is 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.

Psalm 27:5-6

For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. David knew that there was special blessing and protection for the one who sought God so earnestly. It was not a promise to prevent all trouble, but to give security and blessing even in the midst of it.

He will set me high on a rock. David believed that a life spent seeking God would know a measure of safety and security, even in the presence of enemies all around: <<*He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure*>> (Psalm 40:2).

I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy. David's life was filled with celebration and gratitude for all God had done. He would sing and make melody to the Lord who blessed him with his presence and rescued him so often.

Psalm 27:7-12 - Prayer for Continued Favour

These verses turn to address the Lord directly, making it clear that the deliverance asked for is for the purpose of continuing to seek God.

- 7 Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
- 8 'Come,' my heart says, 'seek his face!'
Your face, Lord, do I seek.
- 9 Do not hide your face from me.
Do not turn your servant away in anger,
you who have been my help.

Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!

¹⁰ If my father and mother forsake me,
the Lord will take me up.

Psalm 27:7-10

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud. The celebration of the first half of this psalm might make one think that it was all easy for David. One might think that when trouble came there was no struggle, either with self or God. Yet David shows that even he, the one who sought God with such passion, sometimes felt that God did not hear him immediately.

David addresses his words to seek his face, to more than one person; the singer responds by acting personally on the invitation. The connection between this and seek in v.4 indicates that the seeking is done in the sanctuary.

You who have been my help, do not cast me off, do not forsake me. David used God's past help as a reason to ask and expect future help.

If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up. David knew that the love and care of God could go beyond even the closest human bonds. David probably did not expect his parents to forsake him; yet even if they did, God would not: <<*for he has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you'*>> (Hebrews 13:5b). Although he probably meant this as an analogy, David sent his parents to Moab for protection in 1 Samuel 21:3-4. Perhaps, without their ever intending it, this had made David feel forsaken by his parents.

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

¹² Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.

Psalm 27:11-12

Teach me your way, O Lord. This was a simple prayer for a life of true discipleship. David did not want to live his way, but the Lord's way. On guidance in the psalms, refer to the comments made on 25:4-5.

And lead me on a level path because of my enemies. David did not ask for an easy path, but instead a level or even place, a place of secure standing. It is the same word as used in Psalm 26:12 to describe level ground. David had many adversaries, false witnesses against him, and violent men opposing him. In asking for a smooth path he was not asking for an easy life, but for a stable and secure place to stand against the storms of this life.

For false witnesses have risen against me. To bear false witness was a direct contravention of God's commandments: <<*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour*>> (Exodus 20:16), and: <<*You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness*>> (Exodus 23:1). There were those who would even bear false witness against their saviour: <<*Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, 'This fellow said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days."' The high priest stood up and said, 'Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?'*>> (Matthew 26:59-62).

Psalm 27:13-14 - Wait for the Lord

The singing worshipper addresses each of the other worshippers, with the admonition to live in continued confidence, returning to the trust expressed in vv.1-3.

¹³ I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

Psalm 27:13

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. David's seeking after God, and his knowledge of the Lord, led him to this triumphant statement. He would have given up, i.e. lost heart, but he knew that the good God would find a way to show his goodness in this life as well as the next.

Some speculate that David meant the life to come when he wrote of the land of the living. One can fairly say that this is the land of the dying, as Spurgeon understood, although he offers hope too of the life to come, "in which there are more dead than living, more under ground than above it; where the earth is fuller of graves than houses; where life lies trembling under the hand of death; and where death hath power to tyrannise over life! No, my soul, there only is the land of the living where there are none but the living; where there is a church, not militant, but triumphant; a church indeed, but no church-yard, because none dead, nor none that can die; where life is not passive, nor death active; where life sits crowned, and where death is swallowed up in victory."

On his own, mankind can never grasp the truth of such wisdom: <<*But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Mortals do not know the way to it, and it is not found in the land of the living*>> (Job 28:12-13).

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

Psalm 27:14

Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage. Here King David spoke to his readers, both then and now. From the reservoir of his experience he can encourage everyone to seek after God and to take courage in him.

A Christian should wait for the Lord:

- As a beggar waits for handouts at the rich man's door.
- As a student waits to be taught.
- As a servant waits on their master.
- As a traveller waits for the directions of the guide.
- As a child waits upon its parent.

As the song writer put it: 'Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord', and the psalmist penned: <<*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning*>> (Psalm 130:5-6).