

A life of confident faith

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[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we thank you that to those who know you, it's a joy to sing of what it means to have tasted your goodness, to have proved your love.

Because our experience has proved in our lives, time and again, your graciousness and your goodness through all the changing scenes of our lives.

And our lives being real lives, are not always joyful. There are times of sorrow and struggle. And often, Lord, it seems that these times of sorrow and struggle and pain and distress just would overwhelm us and seem to be without end and without brightness in the horizon.

But how we thank you, Father, that even in the midst of times when it seems that the hosts of enemies camp around us, yet you are the one who is our refuge.

You have proved again and again our deliverance, our glory. You are the one who lifts our head.

So, Father, in knowing you and loving you and serving you and fearing you, taking you seriously and looking at you truly as the awesome God whom you are, learning to live under your great care is how we learn that we have indeed nothing else to fear but that your peace surrounds us and strengthens us and will keep us to the last.

[1 : 51] So, Lord, as we come once again for a final time to the words of this psalm, we pray that you would teach us again of your greatness and give us confidence in you.

So, we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're back in Psalm 3 today for the last time at the moment and you'd like to turn that up with me. You'll find it on page 448 in our Bibles and we'll just read the whole psalm again since it's so short.

Psalm of David, remember? When he fled from Absalom, his son. O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me. Many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God. But you, O Lord, are a shield about me.

My glory, the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the Lord and he answered me from his holy hill. I lay down and slept.

[2 : 59] I woke again for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. Arise, O Lord.

Save me, O my God. For you strike all my enemies on the cheek. You break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

Your blessing be on your people. I'll keep that open in front of you because we're talking in these three Wednesdays about the real Christian life.

And we've been seeing just how realistic this psalm is about the life of faith. There is absolutely no pretense. There is no fantasy. There is nothing, not a shred, of some of the nonsense that we sometimes hear people talking about Christianity.

Oh, well, it's just a crutch to prop up the feeble. It's just a delusion to help you forget the realities of life. Absolutely the reverse is true in this psalm. And we've seen that.

[4 : 02] The first thing we saw a couple of weeks ago is that the real Christian life is a life of constant foes. Oh, Lord, how many are my foes is the opening line. And that's always so, says the Bible, right the way through for those who stand with the despised and hated God of heaven and his anointed son.

Psalm 2, we saw, tells us that, that all the nations, all the people of this world are set themselves against God and his anointed one. And so for the Christian, there will always be enemies without and also enemies within.

The assault of our adversary who brings and loves to bring our own sin, our own guilt before our eyes and to taunt us constantly with those words in verse 2.

There's no salvation for him in God. That's the reality of Christian faith, isn't it? But of course, so is verse 3, as we saw last time.

But God, and the real Christian, can also say, but you, Lord, are a shield about me. And we do have, as Christians, despite all, we have a life of constant fellowship with God.

[5 : 21] We saw last time what the beauty of his presence means to us. He is our refuge. He's our righteousness. He's our restorer. You are my shield.

You are my glory, says the psalmist. You are the lifter of my head. As we saw in verses 4 to 6, his presence also affords us the bountable provision that he gives us.

We know the miracle of prayer to the God who hears and answers us always. We experience the miracle of his providence that surrounds us. He sustains us, verse 5.

And that's why also we can know the great miracle of true peace. We need not fear afraid, even though we are still, like the psalmist, surrounded on every side by countless enemies that seem to be assaulting us, by countless opposition and strife.

Nevertheless, we have peace. I will not be afraid. And that is why, as I want to think about today, despite all that we experience in life, the real Christian life is also a life of confident faith.

[6 : 30] It's not uncertain. It's not unsure and tentative and filled with fear about whether we really will, ever in the end, make it to heaven in one piece.

No, the real Christian life is certain. It's assured. It's even triumphant. Even in the face of everything that life can throw at us. And, and perhaps this is even more important for some of us, even in the face of the dreadful consequences of our own sin and our own mistakes and our own failures in life. Remember, that is precisely the situation that David is facing in this psalm. The consequences of his own sin and failure in his life of faith.

Even in the face of our own massive shortcomings, our own many sinful stumblings, the real Christian life is a life of confident faith in God.

That's what these last two verses of the psalm express, don't they? Let's read them again. Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God, for you strike all my enemies on the cheek. You break the teeth of the wicked.

[7 : 46] Salvation belongs to the Lord. Therefore, your blessing will be on your people. And that's extraordinary confidence, isn't it?

Especially when a psalm began just a few verses ago with that cry, O Lord, how many are my foes? It's extraordinary. How can that be? Because nothing obvious has changed in David's situation.

Verse 6 is plain. He hasn't woken up to discover that all these enemies have suddenly miraculously disappeared. Thousands have thronged against him. So is he just pretending?

Is this just the very worst kind of name it and claim it self-delusion of the charlatan TV evangelist? Is that what this is? Oh no, it's not.

This is not the conceit of the religious fanatic. It's the confidence of the man of true faith.

[8 : 46] Now we need to see three things so as not to misunderstand this. First, there is nothing presumptuous in David's confidence. These words in verse 7 that we read there, they exhibit real faith in the promise and in the provision of the God of the covenant, the Lord that David knows and trusts.

Because you see when he says arise O Lord, he's very consciously echoing the words of Moses. Moses would say those words every time he led the people of Israel to break camp when they were travelling through the wilderness on the way to the promised land.

Every time they were going out against enemies in battle, the ark of the covenant of God would go out in front of the people, be carried by the Levites and it was a sacrament if you like, it was a living sign of God's presence with his people going out before them into battle.

Numbers 10.35 tells us this, whenever the ark set out, Moses said, arise O Lord and let your enemies be scattered and let those who hate you flee before you.

It was a wonderfully symbolic action you see, the word of God going out in front of his people, the word of God's promised salvation, his gospel, leading the people out into battle, leading them on their journey.

[10 : 09] And so it was an act, wasn't it, of supreme trust and faith in that promise of God. When have you ever seen an army being led out into battle by the Bible?

That's not what you do, is it? You send your heavy artillery out in the front, you send all your heavy weaponry. But that's not what Moses did with Israel. And that's not what David is doing here.

David is saying, Lord, my confidence is not in my army, it's in you. It's in your promise. And I'm throwing all of my trust on what you have promised, your covenant word of salvation. I believe you that you are my savior. Savior. And I'm taking out that word. Save me, oh my God. Verse 7.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. Verse 8. So do as you promised. May your blessing be as you promised upon your people. Now you see, that's not presumption, is it?

[11:14] That's faith. That's trust and confidence that what God has said is true will be true. that what God promises, God will always accomplish.

That's the confidence of a real believer that comes out of a relationship with a God who hears and answers prayer. With a God who promises real salvation. Even when, as yet, the present reality of the situation just doesn't seem to show that.

When there are still countless enemies all around. When there are enemies assaulting you perhaps deep within. But real Christian faith can have confidence.

Can have assurance. Total assurance about our salvation. Because we have a sovereign God who has power to save. Salvation belongs to the Lord.

We've got a God who has power to save and we have a God who has promised to save. All who will call on him in truth. So it's not presumptuous, you see, to say, Lord, save me.

[12:22] You must save me. You must because you can't be untrue to your word that you've promised. And that's why real Christian faith is confident faith. We can have that assurance of certainty about our salvation because we know God is truly sovereign.

And because he's promised to give it to all who call on him. He gives it not that we can earn it but he is sovereign and can and will give it.

And that's what Martin Luther discovered, wasn't it? That set his heart on fire and set the whole of Europe on fire in the Reformation that we celebrate here in Scotland this year, 450 years ago this year.

That discovery changed the face of modern Europe because Martin Luther discovered that salvation wasn't locked up in the gift of the church or the priesthood. it wasn't dispensed only through relentless ceremonies, relentless confessions, relentless penances.

It wasn't something that could never ever be certain or assured right until the very end and the last rites were announced and all that. No! Martin Luther discovered what David says here that salvation is the Lord's and what the Lord promises he will deliver to all who trust his promise.

[13:45] To all who have faith in him alone, to all who cry out and say Lord, save me, there can be confidence that that hymn that we sometimes sing, no guilt in life, no fear in death, this is the power of Christ in me.

And that's true no matter how much the present evidence against us in terms of constant foes and all of these things may seem to be.

I love that story in 2 Kings chapter 6. You might remember it when Elisha the prophet and his servant are in the house, do you remember? And all the armies of the Syrians are gathered around the house and there's one little prophet and his servant sitting in there and the poor servant looks out of the window and has an absolute panic attack.

Well, you can hardly blame him, can you? But Elisha's sitting there cool as a cucumber supping his coffee and reading his newspaper and the servant just can't understand it. And Elisha says, oh for goodness sake Lord, open his eyes.

And he goes out and looks again and he sees all the Syrians still there, great huge army but he also sees the vast hordes of the armies of heaven, chariots and horsemen vastly outnumbering all the hosts.

[15:06] that are against them. And that's what trust in God's covenant promise does. It opens our eyes. It doesn't take away the enemies that are against us.

It doesn't close our eyes to the real world and all its foes and all the reality of mess and sin and everything else in our lives and in this world but rather it opens our eyes to the far greater reality. We still see the enemies but we understand the truth that we saw in Psalm 1 and 2 that it's God's word that is the key to life. That it's God's son who rules in the heavens and that therefore to walk by faith, to trust his promises is to have confidence even under the heaviest fire that this world can train on us.

Whatever the world, the flesh and the devil can throw at us, we can have confidence. We can say, you save me, O God, because salvation belongs to you and you promised it to me.

Confident faith, not presumption. But notice also there's no passivity about David's faith either. Real confidence leads David out into battle with the assurance that God will go before him and that he trusts in him and he obeys God to lead out his people with the ark of the covenant in front of them.

[16:40] David has the courage to go out and say, let your enemies be scattered. Let those who hate you flee before you. Because God is the one who alone can bring victory and salvation.

But David has the responsibility to go out and fight the enemy and that is precisely what he did. If you read in 2 Samuel 18, you'll see that he won a great victory for God's people because he had confident faith.

It became a great personal cost, of course, in the loss of his son Absalom. But we know that's true also, don't we? Sometimes winning the great victory for God in our Christian lives and our walk with him does mean losing something very special, very precious to us.

But these two things always go together in the Bible. God's absolute sovereignty in salvation.

Salvation belongs to the Lord but also our absolute responsibility to obey God's call and to act in faith, to trust in his promise, to believe that he will do what he has said he will do.

We can have confidence only because God is sovereign. But we must exercise confident faith for that very reason. Because if you think about it, to do any less is to cast doubt on his sovereignty, isn't it?

[18:00] To cast doubt on his power, to disbelieve the word of God's promise. And that's very, very important. Sometimes people get mistaken and they think, well, I can't be sure that God could save somebody like me because you just don't understand.

You don't realise how bad my life has been. You don't realise how feeble my faith really is. You don't understand how much of a failure that I am.

I can't possibly be confident about my faith. You might be but I can't. But no, that is wrong. The opposite is true. You must trust God.

You must have confidence in your salvation because not to do so, is a far greater sin. It's a far greater wrong because you're calling God's word into question for one thing, aren't you?

You're calling him a liar. And you're also calling God's power into question. You're calling him feeble. You're saying, well, God's not strong enough to save me. Or God's not trustworthy enough for me to really believe him when he says he can save me.

[19:12] So you see, there can't be any passivity from our side. There can't be anything in us that says, well, I must just wait till I feel as though God might be being at work in my life.

Maybe then I could just begin to believe that possibly he could change me. No, the Bible says the opposite. Paul says, you're to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

That is, you're to trust and obey actively and play the part of the true servant of God. Why? For it's God who is at work in you, he says, for his good pleasure.

Salvation belongs to the Lord. He is sovereign, yes indeed, but you, you're not to be passive, you're to be active. Confidently exercising that faith and that trust.

It would be like David saying, yes, arise, O Lord. Save me, O my God. Sometimes sing the hymn, forth in your name, O Lord, I go.

[20:13] My daily labour to pursue. You've got to launch out and say, I will believe and obey. So we must never separate God's sovereign power in saving us and our responsibility to heed him, to listen, to trust and obey.

The Bible never does. Nor does it ever separate two other things that this psalm likewise won't separate. And that is the salvation of God's people and the defeat of God's enemies.

Look at verse 7 again. Save me, O God, for you strike all my enemies on the cheek. You break the teeth of the wicked. And we must be clear, if there's nothing presumptuous about David's faith and nothing passive, then neither is there anything primitive about his view of God's salvation that he's expressing here.

Some people would say that. They're very embarrassed by this kind of talk about smashing enemies. Surely that's the kind of barbarous sort of thing you get in primitive religion.

That's the kind of barbarity of the Old Testament that once we get to the New Testament we leave it all behind. Other people try and soften it so they would say, well, breaking the teeth, it's not an aggressive thing, it's just a way of saying that God will deliver us out of the jaws of vicious enemies.

[21 : 37] But I'm afraid that just won't do. to strike on the cheek is to deal a savage blow of public disgrace, of humiliation to somebody.

We have it a little bit in one of our expressions, don't we? We say that was a real slap in the face for him. We mean they've been humiliated, defeated, publicly disgraced. And the truth is that there could be no salvation for David at all in his current predicament unless there was an out-and-out defeat of the armies that were against him.

And all through the Bible, friends, God's word is clear, clear as day. Ultimate deliverance of God's people will only come through ultimate defeat of all of their enemies.

There is no other way. But that is what God's covenant promised right from the very beginning. And every victory, all the way through the story of God's people, pointed forward and prophesied in miniature, if you like, about the great victory, the ultimate victory over all of the enemies of God's people that God would ultimately achieve.

Victory over sin and guilt and the great penalty of these things which is death itself. And so when Jesus came, great David's greater son, he came, says the New Testament, to destroy the works of the devil.

[23 : 10] He came, says Paul, to the church in Colossae to deliver us from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of his dear son in whom we have forgiveness of sins.

How would he do that? Only, says Paul, by disarming powers and authorities, making a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by his cross, breaking their teeth, slapping their face, destroying his enemies.

That's how salvation comes from the Lord for his people. And that's the great wonder of the gospel of our God of salvation.

That's what links you and me, you see, and every Christian believer with David and his real experience that we're reading about in this psalm. There's nothing primitive at all about David's trust in God.

The marvel is that out of the ashes of human sin, our God works salvation through the triumph of his grace. was out of David's adulterous union with Bathsheba that caused all of this trouble in the first place, caused all of the calamity.

[24 : 27] Out of that union there came a son and his name was Solomon and it was through him that all God's promises for his people lived on until at last of his seed our Lord Jesus Christ came to destroy forever all his people's enemies and to bring the blessing of forgiveness of sins and reconciliation to all his people.

The salvation, you see, that belongs to him has poured out in Jesus Christ that his blessing may truly be upon all of his people a blessing that none can ever take away.

And you see, that's why you and I can have confidence, confident faith. Not to be passive but to rise up and take arms and fight not with the weapons of earthly warfare now in our time of course but with the same war cry in a way arise oh Lord and with the same promise of God leading us in our lives day by day against enemies without with those who oppose Christ and his gospel.

We fight with this same promise the gospel of God. We demolish strongholds of arguments. We bring every thought captive to obey Jesus Christ.

that's the mission of the church. And we have confident faith in the power of the word of God which is his power for salvation to all who believe.

[25 : 54] Even the most hostile enemies you can imagine to bring them captive to the grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the same way we battle against enemies within.

We have the same weapon of the gospel in our hands applied and trusted and cherished in our very own lives. The gospel is our shield of faith also against all the arrows that the evil one will fire at us when we're tempted to despair.

We can claim confidently the righteousness and the peace that nobody can ever rob us of because and only because of the victory of the Son of God over every one of our enemies yours and mine. None can bring any condemnation against you if you're in Christ Jesus. No one can say of you there is no salvation for him in God because Christ has defeated all the powers of evil.

So yes there are constant foes in the life of faith and they will be with us right to the end foes without and foes within. But we have now constant fellowship with a God who is for us everything that we can't be for ourselves.

[27:18] He's our shield he's our glory he's the lifter of our head. And so we can have confidence we can have faith to march out into enemy territory sure in the knowledge that in his great victory is everything everything that we can ever need.

So let me leave you with this thought if at the moment your prayers seem to be a lot like David's oh Lord how many are my foes how big are these battles I'm having to fight how powerful and oppressive all the enemies seem to be all around about me remember you also can have confident faith not because your deliverance is in your own hands or in your own power but because it's in his salvation belongs to the Lord and that means that his blessing must be upon his people and if you're Christ's people then that blessing will be upon you also this day and every day you can pray with confident faith arise oh Lord save me oh my God and this God cannot not answer that prayer of faith let's pray

Lord how we thank you that confidence is not confidence from within us but it's confidence that comes from having our eyes opened to your great salvation open our eyes Lord if they're drifting shut and we're looking only down keep them open we might see like Elisha's servants the might of the armies of heaven who fight for us and therefore never fear whatever this earth may throw at us for we ask it in Jesus our Saviour's name Amen