

Facing Calamity with Confidence

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Preacher: Philip Copeland

[0:00] And we're now going to turn to our Bible reading. Phil Coupland, one of our ministers, is preaching to us this evening from Psalm 27. So do grab your Bible and turn that up. If you! don't have a Bible with you, we have plenty of visitor's Bibles spread around at the front, the sides, at the back. Do grab one of those. If you're not sure where they are, you wave your hand. One of the welcome team sure can bring you one. And we're reading Psalm 27, the whole Psalm, and that is on page 460, if you're using one of those visitor's Bibles.

Psalm 27, a Psalm of David. The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is a stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assailed me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumbled and fell. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war rise against me, yet I will be confident. One thing have I asked of the Lord that I will 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 in his temple. 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. 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. Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud. Be gracious to me and answer me. You have said, seek my face.

[2:01] My heart says to you, your face, Lord, do I seek? Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger. O you have been my help. Cast me not off. Forsake me not, O God of my salvation.

For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in. Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Give me not up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me. They breathe out violence.

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord. Be strong and let your heart take courage. Wait for the Lord. Amen. This is God's word.

Well, good evening, and please have your Bibles open to Psalm 27. That'll be really helpful. Psalm 27.

Well, back in March 2019, I watched the most remarkable game of rugby I've ever seen. Those of you who know me know that I love my rugby, and I watched England versus Scotland in the Six Nations.

[3:35] It was a remarkable match because it was well and truly a game of two halves. In the first half, England came out, and you might remember it yourself, they absolutely battered Scotland. Scored try after try after try. But in the second half, a totally different thing happened. A wonderful thing.

Scotland battered England. Try after try after try. The first half and the second half were so different. It was almost unbelievable. My friends, I tell you that because Psalm 27 is very much a psalm of two halves. In the first section, verses one to six, all is calm as David speaks about the Lord. These wonderful, amazing things that he rattles off about the Lord, his God. And as David does that, he's full of the most wonderful confidence and great assurance. But in seven to twelve, the tone and the feel of the psalm shift almost completely. And David is no longer surrounded by calm, but calamity. And so he cries out now to the Lord directly. And his voice that was once the voice of assured faith at the start of the psalm, is now the voice of agonized faith in the second half. And in verse 13 and

14, there's this very short kind of postscript, this important conclusion. But the main body of this psalm is made up of these two strikingly different halves. What are we to make of it? Well, if you read some of the critics, not that you're into reading biblical criticism, but if you do, they look at these two halves and they say, well, aha, these must have been two separate psalms in the past that some idiot editor of the Psalter has spliced together. And so therefore, we should just ignore it. But that is nonsense, academic drivel. Friends, the Holy Spirit has inspired this psalm to be written this way. So we must assume that he has written this psalm in contrast to teach us something very important. Remember that, we'll come back to it later. Let's look at the psalm under three points. Here's the first thing that we see.

Verses one to six is David's confidence in the Lord. David's confidence in the Lord. Please look at verse one. 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? So right from the beginning, David bursts out. He's almost shouting that there is nothing in this world that he fears, nothing in this world that he dreads. What a thing to say. Why is he like that? Well, he tells us emphatically. It's not because of confidence in himself. It's total confidence in the Lord, his God. He says, the Lord is my light. That is my source of life, goodness, joy, and hope. He's my salvation and stronghold, my source of security in this messed up and wicked world. So what is there for me to dread? Nothing, of course. Now, David knows that he's not making wishful statements about the Lord here, because in verse two, what David does is he looks back into his past to a time when the Lord showed himself to be all that David claims him to be in verse one. And as Josh mentioned earlier, for some reason, the ESV, our translation that we use in our church, it translates verse two in the present tense, but really most trusted commentators say that this should be past tense. The King James puts it well. Verse two, it says, when the wicked, even mine enemies and mine foes came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. My family about a year ago,

I once visited a wildlife park, and we went to this wildlife park, and it rained all day. The wildlife park was, of course, in Scotland. We retreated into the gorilla house, where you could see stuff indoors. [7:48] I saw a lot of myself and the beasts in that enclosure. But the highlight of the day was when the sun came out, and we went to see the tiger feed, the tiger feed. Three enormous tigers were locked up in their shelter. And whilst outside they were locked up, the brave zookeepers were laying out big carcasses of meat that, I must say, looked very, very good, actually. And once they left the enclosure, there was a tiny little door slid open, and just like a bullet, these three beasts came firing out in nanoseconds and pounced on their prey and started ripping and shredding. There was a lot of blood and horror. It reminded me of my family dinner table, actually. But David says, that's how my enemies came for me. I felt like a piece of meat being sought after by these tigers, and they weren't out for my flesh.

They wanted to rip me apart, devour me. He was in danger. But in the end, it was they who were the ones that were brought down, not David. And in light of verse 1, it's clear that he's saying that it was the Lord who caused them to fail. And right in that moment, the Lord showed himself to be David's light, salvation, and stronghold. And that is why David has this beautiful, calm confidence about facing any calamity in the future, any future assaults from his enemies.

Verse 3, he says, look, even if I was to wake up in the morning and look out my window, open the curtains of the kitchen window, and look out and see an enormous army laying siege against me, and all of the troops with all of their weapons aiming right at my head, I will not fear in my heart, because the Lord is my light, salvation, and stronghold. He has shown that to be the case in the past, and therefore, I can trust him for the future. And my friends, as the people of God today, we can also live with the same confidence that David had, because David's God is our God. He is our light, our salvation, and our stronghold. And in fact, from where we stand in salvation history, we know we can look back to a time when the Lord carried out an even greater deliverance than the one David speaks of in verse 2. Because friends, we can look back at a time when the Lord God left the glory of heaven, the second person of the Trinity, took on frail and weak human flesh, put on hands and feet, entered this world of darkness and pain, and having lived the perfect life of human holiness on our behalf, died on the cross, taking the punishment we deserve for our sin and

rebellion against our maker. And more than that, we can look back to the moment when he rose, not just back to life, but up he ascended to the highest place in the glory of heaven, at the right hand of the Father, where he is currently seated above all other name and authority.

He towers over all things. We can look back to the beauty of the Lord Jesus and what he did for us in the greatest deliverance, when he defeated the enemies that you and I cannot possibly handle. The world, sin, Satan, death. He overcame it for us all as our champion. And friends, when we look back at that, it should flood our hearts. The Bible's not saying that we're to never feel fear. That's impossible. It's impossible. There will be moments in our lives when we will fear our hearts are thumping faster because something has hit us that's terrifying.

[11:30] But we can meet that fear and conquer it by looking back with the same confidence and marvelous assurance because we look at what the Lord has shown himself to be for us. A light, salvation, and stronghold.

Here's a question. Is there anything else we can do in order to grow our confidence and assurance? What about David? What did he do in order to maintain and grow his confidence in the Lord?

Well, please look at verse 4. David says, One thing I have 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 in his temple.

That could also be translated as his palace or his house. And here David is telling us that he has deep in the very core of his being, this insatiable desire for ongoing fellowship and communion with the Lord.

And that's why he's so hungry to dwell in the Lord's house and be in the Lord's presence. And of course, back then, the Lord's house was not the temple because it hadn't been built yet.

[12:46] It was built later by Solomon. The Lord's house back then was the tabernacle, the special tent that the Lord had instructed Moses to build back in Exodus, which, as John Calvin says, was an image of spiritual things above, built following the heavenly pattern.

And so in verse 4, David is telling us that he wants nothing more than to be in the Lord's tabernacle, the Lord's tent, so that by faith he can gaze upon the beauty of the Lord as he looks upon it all.

And Dale Ralph Davis, in one of his excellent books, Upon the Psalms, which I really recommend you buy, they're available in our bookstall at the back there, he makes a very compelling argument for interpreting verse 4 in this way.

He says that when David looked upon and when he thought about the Lord's tabernacle and its contents, he would have been reminded about the Lord's beauty. For example, when David looked at the whole tabernacle, it would remind him of the beauty of the Lord's condescension and the fact that the Lord had so graciously humbled himself and come down to pitch his tent and dwell in amongst his sinful and needy people.

What beauty! Or when David thought about the Ark of the Covenant that he knew would have been dwelling in the Holy of Holies and thought about its contents, David would have been reminded of the beauty of the Lord's revelation to his people.

[14:16] Because inside the Ark was the Lord's law, his guiding word to teach his people how to live in response to his saving grace. Or last example, when David looked upon the altar in the tabernacle, David was really looking at the beauty of the Lord's atonement, the Lord's atonement.

In other words, the altar declared to David that the Lord had so beautifully given his people a sacrificial system in order to deal with their sin. Not a sacrificial system, some way of buying off God, rather it was a provision of his beautiful grace to his people.

So that is, I take it, what David is talking about in verse 4. He has a great hunger and desire to be there in worship in the Lord's tent to see the beauty of the Lord and by faith to enjoy being in the Lord's special presence.

But here's a question, what does that have to do with verses 1 to 3? What is the connection between the worship at the tabernacle and David's confidence in the Lord? Well, I take it it's pretty simple.

David is telling us that time that he spends in the Lord's house, enjoying the Lord's presence, looking upon the Lord's beauty, it intensifies his assurance.

[15:35] It heightens his confidence. That's what verse 5 seems to indicate. Verse 4, he says, I want to be in the tabernacle, looking upon the Lord's beauty. Why? Well, verse 5, for, because, and then he lists all of these wonderful things about the Lord protecting him.

Let me read them to you. Verse 5, As one commentator says, David's convictions of verse 5 are the fruit of his communion with the Lord in verse 4.

That is time spent in the Lord's presence, contemplating all that God is to his people, that has a way of reinforcing assurance, of making us ever more confident that we are safe in his hands.

Assurance intensifies when we gather with the Lord's people to worship him and enjoy him. Now, my friends, that is such an important point.

If we want to enjoy the same assurance and growing assurance and confidence as David does here, then we must not give up meeting together with the Lord and with his people as we're doing right now in here this evening.

[17:00] If we want to be disheartened Christians, and I speak from personal experience here, one way that we can do this is to stop gathering together with the church family on the Lord's day.

Stop coming to listen to the Lord's word being preached. Stop coming to the Lord's table. Or tune out during the corporate prayers that we have together here. Because for us today, that is how we meet with the Lord and gaze upon his beauty.

Christopher Ash says this, under the new covenant, the church of Christ, indwelt by the spirit of Christ, is the place where God is to be met on earth.

Through the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and corporate prayer. My friends, the Bible is clear on this. On a Sunday as we gather, it's actually the Lord Jesus himself who preaches to us about himself as his word is opened up so that we are amazed by who he is and how beautiful he is and so that we have a greater confidence in what he's done for us and of what he will do for us.

So if you've ever found yourself lacking assurance as a Christian, and who knows, that might be you this evening. Now look, there might be a whole bunch of reasons why you're lacking assurance. There might be a whole bunch of reasons.

[18:17] But one possible reason is you may well have given up regularly meeting like this. Of course, there'll be times in our lives when we will struggle to get out.

We will struggle because of sickness or circumstances. But if we are able, we must not give up meeting like this as a church family. The best thing for a Christian who's going through the mill is to drag yourself along to enjoy the Lord's special presence.

One of the worst things about going through gruelling chemotherapy and cancer treatment is not being able and not being well enough to gather with the church family. And I speak from personal experience.

But to be here is to be built up because you're reminded of your God's beauty. As someone once said, time spent in the Lord's house and the presence of the Lord, it's never wasted for the believer. It only tends to impress us more with the Lord's persevering and defending work. So that's the first thing we notice in verses 1 to 6.

[19:23] David's confidence in the Lord. Let's look at the second half of the psalm. We're going to run through verses 7 to 12. We see David's cry to the Lord. David's cry.

Please look at verse 7. David says, Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud. Be gracious to me and answer me.

So right away, the tone shifts dramatically. David is no longer talking about the Lord. Notice. He is now crying out to the Lord. The calm of verses 1 to 6 has disappeared.

And now there's a sense of agitation and real urgency as he prays. Now friends, what I want to do is just quickly work through the contents of David's cry from verse 8 to 12 so that we're clear about what he's saying.

And then we'll think about the whole psalm and why has it been written in these two contrasting halves. Okay? So let's quickly run through the rest of David's cry under three sub-points so that we're clear on what he's saying.

[20:27] Here's the first thing that David prays in this section. In verse 8, David speaks about the obedience he practices. The obedience he practices.

Please look at verse 8. David says, Lord, you have said, seek my face. And my heart says to you, your face, Lord, do I seek.

So before David makes his plea, he reminds the Lord of his commandment. The Lord at some time has said, seek my face to his people. That is, they're to do what David describes back in verse 4. They're to have a great hunger for the Lord's presence and for an ever-deepening communion with him. That is a mark of genuine discipleship in the Lord's eyes. And David says to the Lord, that's how I've lived my life.

That's how I've walked, by the obedience of faith in the very core of my being. I've sought you, Lord. And notice it's only after he's reminded the Lord about this obedient faith that David then makes his plea in verse 9.

[21:32] Verse 9, Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger. And all this shows that David isn't someone who simply turns to the Lord because he's going through a time of crisis.

No, David has turned to the Lord throughout his whole life. Now that he's in this time of calamity, he's just continuing to do what he has always done.

So that's the first thing that we hear David praying about in this section, the obedience that he practices. Here's the second thing. Verses 9 and 10, David speaks of the assurance he possesses. The assurance he possesses. Verse 9, Turn not your servant away in anger. My friends, it's very clear from these verses that David is in a very, very dark place.

Verse 10, he speaks of the fact that his father and his mother have forsaken him. Now remember, this is poetry, and so we can't be sure exactly how his father and mother have forsaken him.

[22:54] It might be that David is speaking in hyperbole. That is, he wants to get across the deep pain that he's feeling and loneliness. It's as though his closest relatives in his life, his own father and mother, have abandoned him.

What he's going through, it's that bad. Or it could be a poetic way of saying, my parents have died. However you read it, it's clear David is in a lot of pain. This is bleak darkness.

And yet in the bleak darkness, David has shafts of light. As he said in verse 2, he knows that the Lord has been with him in previous times of distress.

And that gives him a gleam of hope for the present one. And that's why he cries out, look at the end of verse 10, that the Lord will take me in. He won't leave me.

He won't abandon me. Despite how things currently appear in my life, despite the current difficulty I face, I know the Lord will not take me in.

[23:59] You see, it's as though the Lord in his kindness has allowed David to cling on to the truths that David knew about the Lord before the darkness swept over him.

And one commentator says, this is typical of the Lord. He has a knack of inserting little gleams of hope into our desperation. That's the second thing we see in David's cry.

He speaks of the assurance I possess, even in this darkness. Well, thirdly, verses 11 to 12, David prays for the direction he needs.

The direction he needs. Verse 11, he says, teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Give me not to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.

But just notice the start of verse 11. David is asking the Lord to teach him the way. Now, if you were here last Sunday night, I touched on this briefly, but sometimes when the psalmists speak about the Lord leading them in the way, that sometimes means that the psalmist is asking the Lord to teach his people how to live in line with his moral will.

[25:15] That is, guide me according to the way of your precepts, your commandments. But often, this little phrase can also mean, Lord, show me the way of your providence.

That is, provide for me. And I think that is what David is referring to here. He's not asking after any commandments that he's supposed to keep, although he does care about that. See, last Sunday

night in Psalm 25.

But rather, he wants the Lord to show him the wise way he is to navigate and make decisions out of his current troubles. He wants the Lord to show him the pathway through the difficulties and the threats he is facing.

And what David is doing here really pops up later in the Bible, as we've seen in our studies in the book of James, chapter 1. Don't turn to it now, but read it later on. In James 1, verses 2 to 4, it says that you should expect, as the New Testament church today, all kinds of trials of many kinds.

And then in the next verse, James says, in verse 5, when you're facing such trials of these many kinds, ask for wisdom so that it will become plain to you the way the Lord wants you to go.

[26:27] And that is really what David is asking for here in verse 11. He wants the Lord to give him some wisdom to follow the Lord's will. And as he does that, verse 12, he will avoid going the way of the will of the enemy because they're lying in wait, ready to pounce on David in order to bring him down, just like those violent tigers.

So these are the three things that we see in David's cry. And it's things that we can pray when we're in distress. He prays about the obedience he practices. He prays about the assurance he possesses and the direction he needs.

And so let's come back to the big issue that I raised earlier on. How come this psalm has been written like this? A psalm of two halves. Remember, verses 1 and 6, great assurance, calm confidence.

7 to 12, greatly agitated, surrounded by calamity. What is it that David and the Holy Spirit are teaching us by setting the psalm out like so?

Well, I take it this psalm is teaching us an important truth about the life of faith. Here, brothers and sisters, is a psalm that recognizes a common, what we might call, yo-yo pattern of the life of faith.

[27:44] Don't multitudes of the Lord's people know what it is to move all too quickly from times of calm to times of calamity, from times of assured faith to times of agitated faith?

In Psalm 23, speak, don't the Lord's people know all too well that there are times when the Lord will lead us by still, still waters and green pastures, and yet suddenly we find He has quickly led us into a valley of darkness.

Could be a job loss. Could be a diagnosis. Could be the loss of a loved one. Could be persecution simply because you love Jesus.

all of a sudden out of nowhere. That is what the psalm is pointing out to us. And Ralph Davis says that we should find great comfort in this.

This is what he says. Don't you find it so helpful when you run into a Bible passage like this? A Bible passage that makes you say, ah yes, living for Christ, it sometimes goes exactly like that.

[28:53] There are times when we enjoy the beauty of the Lord and calmness. But there are also times when we face unnerving energy. The calm of faith can become the crisis of faith so quickly.

He goes on to see that Psalm 27 assures us that the trauma of verses 7 to 12 doesn't falsify the faith of verses 1 to 6.

In fact, if you look at the psalm, you see that the faith David has in verses 1 to 6 is actually put into action in more depth, I'd argue, when he's in the calamity of 7 to 12.

And that's the way our Lord operates. To deepen our faith, he will make a shift in this way from time to time. So friends, let's allow this psalm to prepare us for what may lie ahead in our lives, both as individuals and as a church.

Then maybe there'll be times in the Christian life when we can echo David's confident words. And maybe that's where you are right now. If that's you, then I say this with great fear and trembling.

[30:03] Don't be surprised if all of a sudden a time in your life comes upon you like a tsunami of trouble. Don't mean to make you all gloomy and pessimistic.

I'm just saying this to be a realist because the Bible is a book for realists. Don't be surprised if your assured faith on that day when trouble hits turns from assured faith to agitated faith.

And when you're in that bleak and dark place, know that you too can and should turn to the Lord in prayer just like David did. And maybe that's a challenge for you because remember, whilst it is a

psalm of contrast, David's faith doesn't change from the beginning to the second half. It is assured to be agitated but it's still faith. Can you say that? Are you ready for the day when difficulty comes like David was? So that in your pain you can keep on seeking the Lord's face as you've always done.

And that brings us to our final and very brief point this evening. The third thing that we see in this psalm is David's call to the Lord's people.

[31:16] Please look at verse 13. And just as I say this, note, this verse should also be translated in the past tense. Let's read verse 13. David is saying, I believed that I would look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

And so the calm seems to have been restored in verse 13. David no longer seems to be in the thick of it here at the end of the psalm. David's calm confidence seems to have been restored.

He no longer seems to be in the darkness. His time of trial, most recent one, has passed. And in verse 13 and 14 I take it he's reflecting upon what has happened to him.

And you know, I'd like to suggest that in these final two verses David is actually calling upon all of the people of the Lord, even us, to follow his example. He wants the Lord's people to have their trust and confidence rooted in the Lord and in his goodness.

Because if we do, then we too will be able to endure like David. And in verse 14 David gives this final word of encouragement to the people of the Lord.

[32:26] He says, verse 14, if you find yourselves facing the type of pressure I faced, wait for the Lord. You notice it? He says it twice.

At the beginning of the verse and at the end of the verse. Wait for the Lord. Wait for the Lord. For he is coming to deliver you. If you wait for him and trust him, he is coming.

He's your light, salvation, and stronghold. But notice, he will only do this according to his timing, which you've got to submit to. God has his own diary.

He will deliver you, but he will do it in his own good time. So wait. But in the here and now as you wait for his appearing, let the knowledge of that future deliverance that's coming fill your heart with great strength and courage so that you will keep trusting the Lord who is your light, salvation, and stronghold.

That is David's call to us as the people of God today. Be strong, full of courage. That's not easy. It's not easy. But it's not impossible either. That's why he says it.

[33:32] Be strong and full of courage, knowing that you wait for deliverance from the Lord. And as you wait for him, it's not in vain. Or by the help of the Spirit of Christ, may we seek to follow his example.

Amen. Let's bow our heads and I'll pray for us. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly Father, we praise you for your word.

And that in your word you've given us all that we could possibly need for living life in these last days. Our gracious God, we ask that you will help us to have all of our confidence rooted in you and in what you've done for us in your Son.

We praise you that you are our light, salvation, and stronghold. Help us to wait well for your glorious appearing of your Son, to hunger for your presence in the meantime, and to trust you with boldness and courage in times of calm and also in times of calamity so that we are ready for whatever lies before us.

We pray all these things in Jesus' precious name. Amen.