

Sunday 18th April 2021, Park Road Baptist Church
Confidence in the Lord - Psalm 27

The shops opened, pubs (outside), hairdressers/barbers, gyms. This week has been quite big in terms of Covid restrictions and mixing with people again. A lot of us are, naturally, still a bit wary of leaving lockdown, worried about it. Of course Psalm 27 has nothing to do with Covid! It is however an expression of confidence in God during a time of fear and danger. We are living in days of uncertainty and fear and danger. Now, as we open up social contact more, we might want to address our fears and reflect on where we place our confidence. Now that the BU have withdrawn their advice to keep churches closed, do we feel enthusiasm or fear about gathering together for worship for example? This ancient psalm, written in very different circumstances to our own, still has relevance for our situation today.

Believed to be a Psalm of David, the psalmist expresses confidence in the presence of God. In v. 1, the Lord is my light, my salvation and my stronghold.

Light – John 1, on the coming of Jesus, John will write “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not, cannot and will not extinguish the light”. Later, Jesus would say in John 8:12, “I am the light of the world”. Light illuminates so that we can see the way. Light keeps us safe when it is dark. The Lord is my light. I don’t want to move on from “light” without reminding us that Jesus would also say, of us, his disciples “YOU are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). As we receive the light of Christ, we are called and commanded to reflect the light of Christ into a world in need of illumination and safety and security.

Salvation, one of those “churchified” words. It just means that we can be made right with God, because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. Our lost souls have found, in Jesus, a way home to God where we will be welcomed home, washed clean and acceptable. The psalmist is saying that none of us can earn salvation, but that it is a gift from God, The Lord is my salvation – nothing I can do to deserve it, it is a gift.

Stronghold God is strength for us in times of weakness. A stronghold is a place of safety and sanctuary for us in troubled and turbulent times. It is a familiar image in the Old Testament. The Lord is a refuge in times of real danger. A strong place for times of weakness.

The Psalmist expresses trust and confidence in God. If God is our light and salvation and stronghold then who would we fear? These words tell us that we have cause to be confident in the love and faithfulness of God. The context for the Psalm, the circumstances, are that there is trouble and danger and enemies. Possibly the nation is at war, enemies, foes and being besieged by armies give that impression. So, this psalm is not written by or for someone for whom everything in the garden is rosy. It is written by and for people who are in danger, who are facing troubles and conflicts.

In these 14 verses, the psalmist writes that their confidence is in the Lord. This confidence is based on answered prayer and God’s care in the past. Has God been good to us in the past? This, says the writer, is why we can be confident in God for the present and the future, because of what has gone before. Trust God, based on God’s goodness to us so far.

There are problems and very real danger facing the people here. They are being urged and encouraged to place their trust in God because God is trust worthy.

One thing the writer asks, to be in the House of the Lord. The Temple is mentioned in v. 4, the Tabernacle in v. 5. We should remember that there was no Temple at this time. It hadn't been built yet so these verses must not be twisted to encourage us back to church before we feel safe! What the writer means is that they want to be in the presence of God for every day of their life (echoes of Psalm 23, verse 6). It may be that the special place of "bricks that have been prayed in", be that a church or a Temple, make it easier for the writer to feel the presence of God. The Tabernacle was a shelter and the idea of a shelter and a stronghold take us again to a place of safety – a place where God is.

When it is time to come back into the church building we will do so with all precautions. We'll need people to help to get things ready again. We'll have to be prepared for changes, no singing for the time being, wearing masks, social distancing, no mingling over coffee. Shall we do this or would it be better to wait till all restrictions are lifted? We'll all have different feelings about this.

What we can all agree on though is that the presence of God is with us wherever we are, at all times. The place where God is, is all around us.

The tone and mood of the psalm change in verses 7 – 12. The expression of confidence doesn't change but there is a clear sense of prayer and pleading in these verses. Almost "what if ...", what if God doesn't come to help us? What if we are overrun by these enemies? What if violence and lies win over truth and peace? The solution for the psalmist is in verses 7-8, prayer. Praying for the presence and power of God in times of trouble. And in verse 11, Teach me your way O Lord and keep me on the straight and narrow. This is a prayer for guidance.

God has been faithful in the past, we trust that God will keep us safe now and in the future. In the meantime, let's trust in the Lord and turn to the Lord, and listen to the Lord and seek the way of the Lord, then walk in it.

Then this expression of unshakable trust comes again as the Psalm ends. Wait on the Lord, be strong, let your heart take courage, wait on the Lord.

We will all have different things troubling us at this moment in time. It may be Covid related? We may be facing challenges with illness, our own or that of others we care for. There might be employment or money worries? Family problems? So many parts of the world are literally at war and people are being bombed out of their homes, are excluded from their land, there are people who are hungry.

Is it twee to say "have confidence in the Lord"? Sometimes I think it is. Unless of course the people of the Lord do open their hearts and minds and souls to the Lord and listen to the council of the Lord (v. 11, teach me your way Lord, lead me in the straight and narrow) so that apart or together all that we do and say works toward bringing peace and justice to God's world.

Remember Jesus said that we are the light of the world, we who know God as our stronghold can be a stronghold to others in times of danger. As we pray for all who face danger and difficulty, can we ask the Lord to show us one thing we can do this week to be part of the solution for them?

Wait on the Lord, be strong, let your heart take courage and wait on the Lord. The Lord is our light and salvation, our stronghold, who then shall we fear? Of whom shall we be afraid? The psalm doesn't end with a triumphant battle won. It ends with the power of faith. Have confidence with God who walks with us through the tough times. Thanks be to God.