

## Psalm 27

### The LORD is my light and my salvation - whom shall I fear?

In his excellent book, *Favourite Psalms*, John Stott notes the comfort of these words

- Words that have been a source of inspiration and strength to many believers
- ‘The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear’
- including James Harrington, the first bishop of Equatorial Africa
- in October 1885, on reaching Lake Victoria Nyanza, he was seized and imprisoned
- consumed with fever and at times delirious with pain, devoured by vermin
- menaced every moment by the prospect of death, he found strength in the Psalms
- and on 28 October, the day before he died a martyr’s death, he wrote in his journal
- ‘I am quite broken down and brought low. Comforted by Psalm 27.’

Rather like a hymnbook the Psalms are not arranged in chronological order

- so it is difficult to identify what circumstances David, the author, has in mind
- but there is more than a possibility that it is one of the royal psalms
- celebrating great occasions in the life of the monarch
- on more than one occasion David had to hide from those who pursued him
- Because he was jealous, Saul was hostile to David and David was forced to flee
- For a time David hid in the cave of Adullam in the hill country of Judah
- David hid from Absalom, his rebel son, until Absalom was killed – While riding
- He was caught in the bough of a tree during a battle and killed by Joab and his men

A new Top 10 chart of pop songs has recently been published

- It is quite an impressive list and includes some great songs
- The Righteous Brothers, ‘Unchained Melody’
- The Police, ‘Every breath you take’
- Eric Clapton, ‘Tears in heaven’
- U2, ‘With or Without you’
- Elton John, ‘Candle in the Wind’
- Sarah Brightman, ‘Pie Jesu’
- Bette Midler, ‘The Wind Beneath my Wings’
- Bill Medley, ‘(I’ve had) The Time of my Life’
- Robbie Williams, ‘Angels’
- James Blunt, ‘Goodbye My Lover’
- In case you haven’t guessed they are the top 10 pop songs requested at funerals

A similar survey conducted by the Co-op in 2005 (and published in *The Guardian*) included

- Frank Sinatra, ‘My way’, Celine Dion, ‘My heart will go on’
- Pop songs now account for 40% of music chosen for funerals
- Causing *Guardian* music writer Lindesay Irvine to observe that perhaps it was
- ‘mawkish sentiment replacing religion’ – not so the Psalms

For the believer, Psalm 27 is a psalm of great comfort because it focuses on

- I FAITH
- II WORSHIP
- III PRAYER
- IV HOPE

## I FAITH

The world at large seems very confused about the nature of Christian faith

- on the one hand there are those who think that faith is nothing more than credulity
- that is that there are some impressionable people who will believe anything
- of course, they are probably right and this is not helped by some Christians
- who seem to think that more ridiculous what you believe is
- the more Christian you must be – that is not faith, that is credulity
- then there are those who think that faith is nothing more than hypocrisy
- where in effect faith is believing what you know in your heart is not true
- but this is not the kind of faith that gives conviction to ordinary Christians
- let alone martyrs and heroes of the faith, whether famous or unknown
- then there are those people who think that faith is just an inner resolve

One of the most distinctive singing voices of the 90s was that of Heather Small

- the voice of pop band *M People*, Heather Small famously sang

You've got to search for the hero inside yourself,  
Search for the secrets you hide.  
Search for the hero inside yourself  
Until you find the key to your life.

These are words that have inspired many of today's young people

- but finding your inner strength is not a Christian idea

In what for the Psalm writer was a time of trouble the ground of his faith is clear

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 psalmist is not speaking about credulity, hypocrisy or inner strength but true faith

- his confidence lies not in his own abilities or strength but in the LORD
- (note that LORD is written in four block capitals – the covenant God of Israel)
- to express his faith he uses three ideas, 'light', 'salvation' and 'stronghold'

When he was king, David's own subjects called him 'the light of Israel' (2 Sam. 21:17)

- But David was constantly aware that the light that shone from him
- Was, like that of the moon, simply reflected light
- And that it was the God of Israel who is the one true light
- The expressions 'light' and 'salvation' mean essentially the same thing
- In the Bible, darkness is often associated with disobedience and death
- But God is light and salvation – and Jesus is the light who overcomes darkness
- The imagery of a stronghold is also familiar in the Old Testament (Prov. 18:10)
- Until recently there was one piece of Latin that every Plymothian knew (on buses):
- *Turris fortissima est nomen Jehovah*, 'The name of the LORD is a strong tower'
- There is nothing that can overwhelm a believer – because our strength is in the LORD

When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall.

(Psalm 27:2)

Regardless of how great the adversities, the psalmist looks at the greatness of the LORD

- Personal enemies (evil men) will not have the final word against the people of God
- In 1998, ten 20<sup>th</sup> century Christian martyrs were commemorated with statues
- At Westminster Abbey, in niches above the west gate empty since the Middle Ages
- Dr Anthony Harvey, the sub-dean of Westminster told the congregation:

“There has never been a time in Christian history when someone, somewhere, has not died rather than compromise with the powers of oppression, tyranny and unbelief but our century, which has been the most violent in recorded history, has created a roll of Christian martyrs far exceeding that of any previous period.”

The story of each of these is an inspiration in itself

- In 1918 Grand Duchess Elizabeth was killed by Bolsheviks as she sang hymns
- Manche Masemola a 16 year old preparing for baptism in S. Africa, murdered (1928)
- Maximilian Kolbe was killed by the Nazis in 1941 (dying in place of a stranger)
- 1941, Lucian Tapiede, Anglican from Papua New Guinea, killed in Japanese invasion
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor killed by the Nazis in 1945
- Esther John was a Presbyterian evangelist from Pakistan, killed by a fanatic in 1960
- Martin Luther King, a Baptist preacher, was assassinated in 1969 (civil rights)
- 1972, Wang Zhiming, pastor/evangelist was killed in the Chinese Cultural Revolution
- 1977, Archbishop Janani Luwum killed under Idi Amin in Uganda
- 1980, R.C. Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated in El Salvador
- and many more in WW II, under communism, and virulent anti-Christian ideologies

Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.

(Psalm 27:3)

The opposition and outright “war” will never have victory over the believer

- because the believer’s heart is strengthened by keeping a perspective on the LORD
- it was this kind of faith that Paul wrote about to the Romans
- If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

(Romans 8:32)

Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

(Romans 8:34)

Again the big question is who will have the last word with regard to the death of Christ

- Those who rejected betrayed and crucified him, or God?

Suffering has always been the lot of the godly – but who has the last word?

- Those who rejected, betrayed and crucified him, or God?
- New Testament believers could trace their sufferings back to Christ
- and rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer for his name (cf. Acts 5:41).

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:37-39)

It is this faith that drives the believer to:

## II WORSHIP

One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: 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 seek him in his temple.

(Psalm 27:4)

The psalmist's desire is to experience more fully the presence of God

- to dwell in the house of the LORD simply means that
- God's 'beauty' is an expression of his goodness to his people
- For when Moses saw the glory of the LORD
- It was his eternal character, rather than any visual characteristics, that was revealed
- God revealed to Moses his perfections, his love and his compassion (Ex. 34:5-6)

The Temple was the place where the holy ordinances of God were observed

- It was here that the priests had their lodgings
- For the Christian it does not mean that we should desire to live in church
- Though critics in the family might suggest 'you should take your bed down there'
- Instead what it means is to celebrate the presence of God in the company of his people
- Through the ministry of his Word, the observance of his sacraments
- The fellowship of his people and the declaration of thanksgiving and praise
- Henry asks, 'Do we hope that praising God will be the blessedness of our eternity?'
- 'Surely then we ought to make it the business of our time – practising for eternity'

For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock.

(Psalm 27:5)

The psalmist seeks the Lord in his 'trouble' knowing that he need not be afraid

- ultimately he finds protection for himself and his people in the dwelling of God
- for a believer's security is not in the walls of the temple but the God of the temple
- he likens this protection to being placed high upon a rock

Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his tabernacle will I sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

(Psalm 27:6)

Confident of God's help, he anticipates a victory over the enemies

- and vows to sacrifice to the LORD as an expression of his devotion
- and to sing and to make music to the LORD

Most of us are familiar with the saying if not the TV programme, 'You are what you eat'

- less familiar is the idea, 'you are what you sing'
- the Methodist people have always used what we sing as a devotional aid for prayer, for reading at home and not just for singing on Sundays
- what we 21<sup>st</sup> century believers must do is to step back from the tunes and re-engage with the words of what we are singing
- remembering that what really matters in worship is not how we feel but whether God is honoured and we are built up by his Word and his people
- from a statement of faith and worship the Psalm writer moves on to:

### III PRAYER

The prayers in the Psalm show a period of searching through which true faith develops

Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.

(Psalm 27:7)

The great thing to notice about the prayer is the use of the name of the LORD

- for the Christian the precious name we use is the name of Jesus
- for it captures our faith – the Lord saves
- our worship – the name that is above every name
- and our prayer – for we are to pray in the name of Jesus (John 16:24)

My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, 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, O God my Saviour.

Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.

(Psalm 27:8-10)

It is because the psalmist can rely on the promises of God that he is devoted to him

- God has been his helper, and his Saviour
- And more faithful than even his earthly parents
- God is the loving Father who will never close the door on one of his children

Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.  
Do not hand me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence.

(Psalm 27:11-12)

The psalmist realises that only God can take his people out of distress and lead them to safety

- The straight path or level ground is one from which all obstacles have been removed
- After all, if God is with his people no force can overcome them
- It is this that leads finally to the psalmist's

#### IV HOPE

I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

(Psalm 27:13)

Strongly convinced that God will come to the rescue of his people

- His faith, worship and prayer have brought him to greater hope
- Hope based on God and the Covenant name of the LORD
- But this is not a hope that he wants to keep to himself

Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

(Psalm 27:14)

These words of encouragement are reminiscent of Moses' words to Joshua (Deut 31:7)

- God is the loving Father who will never close the door on one of his children
- But their emphasis is that the believer must share the message of hope with others
- As the Apostle Peter would later write:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

(1 Peter 3:15)

The hope of the believer is focused upon God

- The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear
- The hope of the believer is strengthened by worship
- One thing I ask – to dwell in the house of the Lord, to gaze upon his beauty
- The hope of the believer is strengthened by prayer
- Hear my voice when I call, O LORD
- The hope of the believer is focused on Jesus

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:38-39)