

“HELP FOR TODAY, HOPE FOR TOMORROW” – PS PETER ANDERSON

Psalm 27

We have an election coming up on 7 November. Let us be praying for the Lord to overrule in the affairs of our nation. We need wisdom to know which candidates and which parties to vote for. Without the mercy and grace of God, and without God-fearing leaders and without righteous laws, New Zealand will continue to slide further away from our Christian heritage.

Many people are concerned about the cost of living. Issues such as health, education, and public safety are also on peoples’ minds. People worry about their future, and they worry about their children’s future.

As Christians, of course, we too are concerned about such things, but we are also concerned about moral and ethical issues.

We see the undermining of marriage and the family. We see the blatant bias of our increasingly leftwing media. We see the prevalence of “wokism” and “cancel culture” that denies biology and common sense. Radical gender and sexuality ideology and LGBTQ+ propaganda are openly promoted. And we have one of the most extreme abortion laws in the world. It is shocking how many babies are killed in the womb. And this “death cult”, I believe, also lies behind our euthanasia or “assisted dying” laws.

Despite the fact we live in such a beautiful and hitherto blessed country, we live in times of great evil and confusion, times filled with uncertainty, fear, and even despair.

Some 3000 years ago, when King David also faced such times, he was inspired to write Psalm 27. We are reminded in what he wrote that whatever is happening around us, in God we can find help for today and hope for tomorrow. In the darkness, He is there to give us light, to show us the way. In the hopelessness and despair, He is there to deliver us and bring us to safety.

For the message today, I have four simple headings:

1. **WHO SHALL I FEAR?** (Verses 1-3)

Let us read what David writes in verse 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?**”

When things looked dark and uncertain, David confidently could say, “**The Lord is my light**”. And David also said the Lord is “**my salvation**”. David knew that the Lord cared about him and could deliver him from evil and danger.

Of course, salvation in the Bible means a lot more than deliverance from physical danger or trouble. Salvation in the Bible is all about being raised from ‘spiritual’ death to new life in Christ. It is all

about God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life for all who repent and believe in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Salvation is all about becoming sons and daughters of the living God through what Jesus did for us on the Cross.

I wonder if you, dear friend, can say with David, **"The LORD is my light and my salvation"**? If you can, then with David you can ask, **"...whom shall I fear?"**

David is implying of course that there was *no one* he needed to fear. If we belong to Jesus, then we can say the same. No one and nothing need shake our confidence because our trust is in the Lord our God.

This does not mean, of course, that everything will be easy going. There are many examples in the Bible and all through history of believers standing up for their faith or standing up for what is right and having to face a backlash. Just think of Joseph refusing to give in to temptation even though it led to him being falsely accused and thrown into prison. Think of Daniel's three friends who refused to bow down to the golden image in Babylon. They ended up being thrown into the fiery furnace. God delivered them of course.

Many of the Apostles, including Paul, were martyred for the faith. And Christians have faced persecution in every century since.

In the second century, there was an elderly bishop named Polycarp who was the leader of the church in Smyrna in the Roman province of Asia Minor (present-day western Turkey). In a wave of persecution against Christians, Polycarp was arrested. He was told that unless he denied his faith and cursed the name of Jesus, he would be burned alive. Replying to his persecutors, Polycarp replied, *"I have served Jesus for eighty-six years, and He has never done me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?"* Fearing neither man nor death Polycarp bravely died in the flames.

In many countries today, Christians face persecution for their faith. Here in New Zealand, we are highly unlikely to face physical persecution. However, it is not always easy to stand up for Jesus in our increasingly secular anti-Christian society.

In such a time as this, do we have the assurance the Lord is our light and our salvation? I love what the Psalmist, David, says next. He continues in the second half of v.1., **"... The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?"** In this context a stronghold is a place of safety, a place of refuge.

A stronghold usually has thick, high walls. Those inside the stronghold are protected from their attackers. They need not be afraid.

Some years ago, Elizabeth and I stayed with friends in the city of Urbana in Illinois. We were there to attend a huge student missions convention. The home of our friends had two stories—one of

which was below ground-level. The area below ground-level, a basement really, had a big trap door that could be lowered across the top of the stairs cutting it off from the house above. Our friends told us that in the event of a tornado they could seek shelter down in that basement. Illinois being part of America's Mid-West is sometimes affected by deadly twisters or tornadoes. Even if a tornado ever struck the house of our friends, they would be safe in that basement. It was like a **“stronghold”** in which to take shelter. And in the storms of life the Lord Jesus is our stronghold—as we go to Him for shelter.

In vrs 2 & 3, David speaks of being under attack—attack from people out to destroy his reputation and pull him down. He writes,

“² When the wicked advance against me to devour [or slander] me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. ³ Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.”

How could David be so confident? The only reason is he knew the Lord was with him. Even when everything seemed to be going wrong, his confidence was in the Lord.

How do we cope, how do we react, when faced with seemingly “impossible situations” or when confronted with unexpected, bad news?

Back in 1997 in Hong Kong my late wife Geralyn needed to have surgery to remove a tumour. Of course, we were hoping it was nothing serious.

We arrived at the Hospital in good time, and I was shown where I could wait. As my wife went into theatre, she told me later, the words *“Safe in the arms of Jesus”* filled her mind. She was perfectly at peace.

During the surgery, as I sat quietly waiting and praying, I sensed the Lord asking, *“Will you trust Me, Peter, whatever the outcome?”*

Well, that tumour turned out to be cancerous. Despite the fact things had not turned out as we had hoped and prayed, my wife seemed so peaceful and strong. God's grace clearly was being poured out upon her. For me, though, it was an extremely testing time. For both of us, of course, the many months of treatment that followed were no less challenging. Fourteen months later my beloved wife, at just 47 years of age, was called home to be with the Lord, the One she loved and had served so faithfully.

For the Christian, of course, facing bad news and even facing death is far from easy. However, we can still say with David, **“my heart will not fear.”**

It is wonderful that in the Gospels, when Jesus appeared to His followers after His resurrection He said to them, **“Do not be afraid”**. You and I have a resurrected Saviour. Because the Lord Jesus is

alive and because He is with us, we can ask, as David did, **“Whom shall I fear?”** And the answer is, we need not be afraid of anyone or anything, not even death.

We don’t know what the future holds, but we do know the One who holds the future. This brings us to my second heading:

2. **ONE THING I ASK** (verses 4-6)

In his life David faced many highs and lows. He had won great victories and had suffered devastating defeats and failures. He had faced personal and national crises.

Learning to trust the Lord in both good and bad times doesn’t happen by chance. I think the secret of David’s being able to trust God even when facing trials and danger was his passion and love for God. He had a singleness of purpose. God was first in David’s life. We see this in what he writes in v.4ff.

“One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple.”

David longed, **“to gaze on the beauty of the LORD”**. Gazing upon the Lord and seeking the Lord were his absolute priorities.

David was captivated by the awesomeness of the Lord. He loved being in the house of the Lord, the tabernacle, because that was where he felt closest to God.

Of course, when David says he wants to dwell in the house of the Lord he did not mean he wanted to literally spend all his time in the tabernacle. David was the king of Israel with the heavy responsibility of leading God’s people. However, as king he knew he needed God’s wisdom, protection and power. He knew he could not handle the unrelenting pressure, the challenges, the trials and dangers of life without the Lord.

All my life, from as early as I can remember, I have loved church. I am sure most of you also love coming to church. Reasons for enjoying church might include the music, the singing, the food, the friends, the fellowship, and hopefully the preaching. Whatever your reasons for coming to church, however, might I suggest, our main reasons for coming to church should be to worship God and to hear His Word. And after worshipping the Lord and hearing His Word, it should be our aim to go out into the world to live for Him.

As believers let us be faithful in attending and serving in church. And let us also, no matter what our profession or our work, seek to live each day in the presence of God. We too can know His presence with us, not only in church but also in the workplace, in the office, in the factory, at school, and in the home.

In verses 5 & 6, David writes, **“⁵ For in the day of trouble He will keep me safe in His dwelling; He will hide me in the shelter of His sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.”**

David speaks here of the Lord hiding him in the shelter of His sacred tent. And this is followed by another image—the image or picture of being safe high up on a rock—safe from the dangers below.

There is a lovely old hymn, “Hiding in Thee”. The 1st verse goes:

*“O safe to the Rock that is higher than I,
My soul in its conflicts and sorrows would fly;
Alone I would perish, undone would I be;
Thou blest “Rock of Ages,” I’m hiding in Thee.*

David would say amen to that. Alone he would be lost but with God he is safe, safe above the storm, safe in the storm, safe from his enemies, those who wanted to pull him down and destroy him.

He goes on in v.6, **“⁶ Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at His sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.”**

Those who have no hunger for God’s Word, no time for church, no heart for worship probably do not have a real heart for God either.

Some people are so busy during the week—and also at weekends—that they have little time for or interest in attending church on a Sunday.

I remember a taxi driver in Taiwan telling me that he was far too busy to go to church. A little further along as we passed a sports club he told me he was a keen tennis player and spent several hours each week playing tennis. I remember thinking, *“Plenty of time for tennis but no time for church—it’s not a question of ‘no time’ but a question of where one’s heart is”.*

If you could ask **“one thing”** from the Lord, what would it be? Do we, like David, long above all for a close relationship with the Lord?

This brings us to our third heading:

3. **HEAR WHEN I CALL** (verses 7-10)

When we face trials or danger or when we feel afraid, what is our first reaction? Is it a case of: *“If all else fails, try praying”*? No, praying should be the first thing we do. We should cry out to God and look to Him for help in time of need.

David prayed in v.7, **“Hear my voice when I call, O LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.”** David knew that he could experience God’s guiding presence every day, and not just when troubles came his way. He knew that at any time, whatever his need, he could call out to God.

Have you ever cried out to God asking Him to help you or rescue you? As we cry out to God, it is important to remember that He is a God of love and mercy. He shows us mercy even though we do not deserve His mercy.

God's mercy is the only hope for a sinner. And it is also the only place of safety for the believer. God loves to hear and answer the prayers of those who call out in genuine humility and sincerity.

As we saw a moment ago, David's number one priority in life was to get to know God better. We see this again in v.8 where he says, **"My heart says of you, 'Seek His face!'"** This can also be translated, **"To you, O my heart, He has said, 'Seek My face'"** which makes God the one giving the invitation. God says to you and me, **"Seek My face!"** He invites us to draw near to Him.

Notice how David responds to this invitation. He immediately says, **"Your face, LORD, I will seek."** There is no delay. David does not hesitate.

How wonderful it would be if all of us responded to God's invitation to seek Him with this same eagerness!

David goes on to pray, **"⁹ 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, God my Saviour."**

I wonder what David means? Does he think God is angry with him? Does he think God may no longer want to help him? I don't think so. David has experienced the Lord's deliverance on many occasions already. I think David is simply expressing his thoughts while he waits for God to respond to his cry for help.

Sometimes God intervenes immediately but sometimes He doesn't. In those times when we must wait, we might get anxious thinking God no longer hears us. In fact, these times of waiting can remind us that God knows best and His timing and His ways are perfect.

God's love is truly incredible. It is even more amazing than the love of a parent. See how David continues, **"¹⁰ Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me. 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, God my Saviour."**

On very rare occasions parents might abandon their children. Some children suffer from broken homes, or from abusive parents addicted to drugs or alcohol. Sometimes children get separated from their parents by war or death. Many carry hurts from childhood into adult life.

Our loving Heavenly Father, however, never leaves His children. He never forsakes us. As we get to know the Father's heart and as we experience His love, we find healing for hurts from the past.

In Isaiah the Lord asks His people, **"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"** (Isaiah 49:15)

What fantastic assurance the child of God can have! Our loving Heavenly Father never forgets His children. He hears us when we call.

And now to our final heading:

4. **TEACH ME YOUR WAY** (verses 11-14)

David was not only a worshipper seeking God's face; he was also a follower, seeking to walk and live in God's way. In seeking and in following God, inevitably David faced opposition—opposition from people and opposition from Satan, the Evil One.

He writes, **"Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. ¹²Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations."**

David asks God to protect him from his enemies, from those slandering him, from those trying to hinder him from obeying God.

David is humble enough to admit that he does not know the best path to take. He says to God, **"... lead me in a straight path."** David asks the Lord to keep him from crooked ways. He is not simply asking for a map or for directions. He wants the Lord to be his guide and his protector on the journey.

Looking at the context, notice when David prays, **"Teach me your way, LORD"** he has in mind the fact he faces many **oppressors**. He faces great opposition. He needs the Lord to show him how to deal with the attacks of fellow human beings and how to overcome the attacks and schemes of Satan.

In dealing with people who oppose us or criticise us, it is wise to accept constructive criticism. Through it we can learn and improve. When criticism, however, is nasty and unfair, we need to keep calm and not react in an ungodly, proud or angry way. But we must never apologize for doing what is right nor should we be bullied into compromising with evil.

Let us like David pray, **"Teach me your way, Lord."** Let us ask Jesus to show us what He wants us to do, how He wants us to respond or react.

In the 1990s, many Christian young people used to wear a wrist band with the letters WWJD on it. This was abbreviated from the phrase "What Would Jesus Do?" It was used to remind those wearing the wrist band to speak and to act as Jesus might speak and act. It was a reminder to seek to emulate the loving, courageous and godly example of Jesus.

When it comes to facing the evil attacks and schemes of Satan, however, the Apostle James has good advice for us. **"Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."**

(James 4:7)

So, we must not let the fear of man hold us back from our commitment to Jesus. Nor must we allow Satan to fool us with his lies and deceptions. God's way is a straight or right way. Satan's way leads to regret, misery and even ruin. His way is a crooked way.

Even when he had to wait for God's answers David could say, **"I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."** (v.13) The "land of the living" simply means "while I live" or "in this present life". David was obviously facing great trials, but he remained confident that the Lord would see him through.

Let us remember that God is good. As the little phrase puts it, *"God is good all the time—all the time, God is good."* Remember this when the devil tempts you to doubt or give up.

Yes, God's way is perfect, even when we cannot see the way ahead, even when we find ourselves in a storm. Sometimes the Lord calms the storm but at other times He calms His children in the storm.

David's advice to us in such times comes in the last verse of this wonderful Psalm. In v.14 he says, **"Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."**

We find waiting hard, don't we! We hate waiting in traffic or having to stand in a long line at the supermarket checkout. We want things done right away. After all, we have instant coffee, instant noodles, and almost instant information on our smart phone.

It is no surprise that the Bible often tells us to be patient. God's Word says, **"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."** (Galatians 6:9)

And we are told to be patient as we wait for the coming of the Lord. So then, let us **"Wait for the Lord"**. Let us wait in humble obedience, gladly serving Him, knowing that He sees and will reward us in His perfect time and way. Let us not give up but encourage one another to be strong in the Lord.

Studying Psalm 27 this morning, we have been reminded that whatever is happening around us, in God we find help for today and hope for tomorrow. Despite having to face trials and dangers, there is no one and nothing we need fear. Like David, let us make having a close relationship with God our number one priority. Let us call out to God, not as a last resort but as our first and most natural response to every danger and every challenge. And let us ask the Lord to teach us and lead us in His way.

So, brothers and sisters, although we may not know what the future holds, we do know who holds the future. And if we are trusting in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, and if we are walking in obedience to Him, we know that He holds our hand—and we have nothing to fear.