

**Sermon preached at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Kingstowne, Virginia,
by Dr. David Fischler, on Sunday, August 23, 2015**

MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION

Psalm 27:1-14

I am going to be preaching from Psalm 27 in just a moment but first I feel the need to mention this. You remember in Luke chapter 4, one of the first times that Jesus preached in public, we're told that He went to the synagogue in Nazareth and that that was His custom. The scroll of Isaiah was placed before Him and He read from it that "the spirit of the Lord is upon me because He anointed me to preach the good news to the poor," etc., and then He rolled up the scroll and He gave it back to the attendant and do you know what He did? He sat down. See, we've been doing it wrong all these years. This is the way to do it. That was the custom in those days. The custom in these days, of course, is to stand, but you'll forgive me if I don't. And in this Jesus-like position I ask you to turn to Psalm 27.

Psalm 27 is a psalm that takes a couple of different forms. It begins with a meditation and it's a meditation that we might describe as focused faith. This is a psalm of David and he begins with a proclamation of faith. He begins, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" He embraces God as his own. Not just the God of all creation, though He is that. Not just the God of Israel, though He is that. He is *his* God. "The LORD is *my* light," he says, "*my* salvation." He's the stronghold of David's faith. It's why it is that he has no reason to fear anyone. At the heart of this psalm, as at the heart of all psalms, is that relationship between God and His people, both as a whole and as individuals.

He then goes on to make three confessions regarding the nature of that relationship. He says first, "The LORD is my light." He is the One who will dispel – and does dispel – the darkness that his enemies would consign him to. I'm sure you're aware at least in outline, of the life of David. It was not a matter of going from triumph to triumph but at every moment of his life, from the first point where he came into public view at the age of around 15, probably, he was being threatened. Threatened first by Saul who considered David to be a threat to his own power and to his throne. Later, threatened by the enemies of Israel who surrounded his kingdom. Later threatened by enemies within. After he had become king he found himself opposed even by his own son, Absalom.

This was a man who spent at least part of his life on the run and who spent at least part of his life presumably in situations that would cause the rest of us to fear for our lives. And yet, despite that, he still looked to the Lord as his light, even in the midst of the darkest times. Even when his son turned against him, for instance. He knew that the Lord would provide the light that he needed for his path. One might say that even in the midst of his own sinfulness, which perhaps were the darkest times in his life, then above all it was the Lord who gave him the light to show him the path out of that. And to that end he says that He's not only his light but his salvation. The word that's used there includes the ideas of deliverance and rescue. Obviously rescue from his enemies is significant.

Rescue from his own sinfulness is part of that as well. Surely, when David was contemplating what he had done to Uriah in order to lay hands on Bathsheba, and when Nathan confronted him and said that he was the man of whom he spoke, using the metaphor of the lamb that had been stolen, David at the moment would have realized, “I am in utter darkness and there’s no way I can save myself.” So he looked to the Lord for that salvation.

He says that “the LORD is the stronghold of my life.” He’s the One who protects His people from their enemies and that’s a message that we especially need to hear today. Have you noticed lately that there’s been a lot of talk from the pulpit and in the prayers of the church family and probably in a lot of your conversations about the circumstances in which we find ourselves, in a world that is increasingly hostile to the message of the Gospel and to God’s people. A world in which brothers and sisters of ours are literally dying day by day throughout the Middle East from the persecution that they’re experiencing. When we, though not dying, are nevertheless seeing freedoms slowly, slowly but still perceptibly being curtailed even in our own country. It would be easy to see only darkness. It would be easy to see only the enemies. It would be easy to see only that things aren’t as good as they used to be. You know, it’s not 1958 anymore. But even in the midst of that, God, he says, is his stronghold, even as He is our stronghold. And as a result of that relationship in which God is his light and his salvation and his stronghold, he proclaims that he has nothing to fear from anyone who comes against him.

Now I think it’s important that we recognize what he’s saying there. He is not saying that he is a man who knows no fear. He is not saying that he is never afraid, that he’s never scared, that he never has any trepidation about the circumstances in which he finds himself or the possible consequences of his actions. Remember, even our Lord, faced imminently with the cross, was afraid. He’s not saying that God being our light and our salvation and our stronghold means that the human emotion of fear has been banished. But what he means is that even in the face of the worst that the world can throw at us – whether it’s Islamic persecution or cancer or unemployment or the wrath of children or parents – in the face of the worst that the world can throw at us there is no need for us to give in to despair or to the illusion that we are all alone. Because we never are. And the Lord will bring us through even those crises that seem likely to overwhelm us.

So, meditation begins with a proclamation of faith and then it moves in verse 4 to a declaration of desire. In verse 4, he says, “One thing I ask of the LORD; this is what I seek...” This is the one thing that he really wants. He wants wealth and fame and power and people to bow down and kiss his feet and to be the big kahuna. That’s what he wants. Isn’t that what everybody wants? His desire here seems kind of odd in the face of the world, doesn’t it? “That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all of my days; to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple.” Power, wealth fame? No. He wants to go to church. Doesn’t that sound weird? You go up to the average person on the street and you ask him, “Which would you rather have? Would you rather have \$10 million (used to be \$1 million dollars but, you know, inflation) or the ability to go to church every time the doors are open?” It would be interesting to see what kind of response you would get to that. Bring your cell phone, make a YouTube,

become famous based on the answers to that. What he's talking about here is he wants to be open, continually, to God's presence in his life. He's not saying that he wants to be physically in the Jerusalem Temple all of the time. He never wants to leave this building in this one place. Yes, he does want to go to it, or at least he would if it had been finished in his day. What he wants is to be in the Lord's presence at all times. And he wants to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, which is a wonderful expression. The word for beauty there means delightfulness or pleasantness. When he looks on God he sees One who is awesomely beautiful. Think of the most beautiful painting, the most beautiful sculpture, the most beautiful building you've ever seen. Think of the most beautiful piece of music you've ever heard. And now imagine a person who not only embodies that beauty but goes so far beyond it that you find yourself just left speechless before it. That's what we see in the face of Christ. That beauty, that delightfulness.

One of the ways that the church in the Middle Ages kind of went off the track was that it lost this sense of the beauty of God seen in Jesus Christ. That's one of the reasons why the cult of Mary became such a big thing, because people saw in her the beauty that they wanted to see but couldn't see in Christ because He had been made such a colossal figure, such a figure of awe and fear because He was the just Judge who we would one day stand before and have to account to for our every action. And people were so terrified of that prospect, knowing that they were sinners, that they fled to Mary, because they thought, "We can't approach a Christ like that. So we'll talk to His mother instead." Something every Jewish son can relate to. Except these were Gentiles. Kind of weird. But here in Psalm 27, we're directed not toward Mary, but we're directed toward God and we're directed toward His Son. It is in Him that David gazes upon the beauty of the Lord. Which is another way of saying it's not enough to be in God's presence. It's equally important that we see Him for who He actually is. No delusions, no mistakes, no giving in to the temptation to make God in our own image, but rather to see Him for who He is.

Why does he want to be in the house of the Lord? He wants to be in the house of the Lord, he says in verse 5, in the day of trouble, especially, that he might be safe, that he might be hidden, that he might be kept and that he might inquire of Him, that he might speak to Him. He wants to relate to Him. He wants a genuine relationship that you can't have with an idol, and you can't have with the things of this world, but you can only have with another person. Imagine if you were a person of that day, a non-Israelite, and you found your gods in idols, in things that you or other people had made. They were made out of gold, they were made out of silver, they were made out of bronze or stone or straw. Imagine talking to that. Imagine having a relationship with an idol. Here's another way to think of this. How many of you have ever talked to your bank account? Rick, being an economist probably has. I don't know about anybody else. How many answers do you ever get from your bank account to the questions of life? Not really. A bank account is just a thing. And the idols that the people that surrounded Israel made, they were just things, too. You could talk to them all you wanted but they didn't talk back. They didn't respond. Oh, you could delude yourself into thinking that maybe they did. If you sacrificed to them, that you'd get what you were hoping for – good weather or a good crop or more children or whatever it is that you asked for. And if you didn't get it you

would just say, “Well, he didn’t hear me or he didn’t like my sacrifice.” But the truth of the matter is that it was just like your bank account. It couldn’t do anything in response to your requests. It was just a thing.

That’s not what David’s looking for and so it is that he says, “One thing I ask of the Lord; this is what I seek. To gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple.” To relate to Him. And what happens when God gives us the desires of our hearts? Well, he says in verses 5 and 6, “In the day of trouble He will keep me safe in His dwelling.” Not that nothing bad will ever happen to him. But, “He will hold me in the palm of His hand and even my own sinfulness, even my own walking apart from Him, will not ultimately separate me from Him.” Who does that sound like? Sound like the Apostle Paul in Romans 8? For what can separate us from the love of God? Nothing. Even our own sinfulness will be overcome. So He’ll protect us from those who would separate us from His love, He will give us victory against those who come against us. Then in verse 6 he says this: “Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me. In His tabernacle will I sacrifice. With shouts of joy I will sing and make music to the LORD.” Because there is nothing that should give us more joy and nothing that provokes us more to singing than what the Lord has done for us. What He will do for us and Who He is.

I’m not going to ask for a show of hands. You know what the answer to this question is. How many of you sing in the shower? Why do you sing in the shower? Because no one can hear you. But why do you *sing*? Why do you sing at all? Generally we sing as an expression of something that we’re thinking or feeling or both. And that’s what he says: “I will sing and make music to the LORD.” Why? Because he comes before Him with shouts of joy. Singing is an expression of that joy. What was the first praise song we sang this morning? *There is Joy in the Lord*. I didn’t even ask Kathy to pick that one. She just did it on her own initiative prompted by the Spirit of God because He knew that the subject of joy was going to come up. There is joy in the Lord.

Well, that’s David’s meditation. Now the tone changes a little bit, because in verse 7 he moves to prayer. So far he’s been just ruminating on who God is and his relationship with God and what he’d like from God. Now he says, “Hear my voice when I call, O LORD.” He’s moving from saying he will pray to praying. “Hear my voice, O LORD.” And he moves there from meditation on the Lord to conversation with the Lord. That’s an important shift. A lot of us have a hard time making that shift. I’m going to confess, I’m one of those who has a hard time making that transition. Thinking about God, meditating on Him, pondering His truth, this is everything to me. This is what gets me charged up. Anybody who’s ever seen me teach a Sunday School class knows that this is the kind of thing that really turns me on. The class I’m teaching right now on Reformed Theology, the distinctives of reformed theology, that energizes me, that recharges my batteries.

But then having thought about God, about who He is, about what He’s done, it’s necessary to move on. To go from thinking about Him to talking with Him. To recognizing, for instance, that all of that stuff about total depravity, which is so

fascinating to ponder, I'm totally depraved. I'm sinful through and through. And so it's necessary for me to go to Him and not just consider the possibility that forgiveness is available in Jesus Christ, but to say, "Lord, I have sinned before You. Please forgive me and restore me." That's what David does in the second part of this psalm. He says, "Hear my voice when I call, O LORD. Be merciful to me and answer me." He recognizes that even the answer that he seeks is not something that he can compel. That God speaks to His people because He chooses to, because it's a real relationship, because God is not a slot machine that we put a quarter in. You don't put a quarter in a slot machine anymore, do you? What do you put in slot machines these days? A dollar, five dollars? Whatever it is. I've never actually been in a casino except to marry my brother. And that's another story I'd be glad to tell you later on. Anyway, you put your money in a slot machine, you pull the handle and down it comes. Or it doesn't. But it doesn't matter because it's all mechanized anyway so you haven't actually done anything but pull the handle. The point is, God's not like that. God's not a machine whom we can place orders with and demand an answer from. So David says, "Be merciful to me and answer me." He's saying in essence, when you go to that conversation, when you stand before God and you want to lay before Him the concerns, the desires, the sins of your heart, first ask, "Lord, I'm here and I'd like to speak with You and I'd like for You to speak with me. Be merciful to me."

"My heart says of You, 'Seek His face.'" There is something within the heart of David and within the heart of every Christian that says, "Go to Him." Yes, it's not convenient. Yes, there are other things that are more interesting, supposedly, to do right now. Yes, there are supposedly more important things to do. You've got a report to write for your boss. You've got a homework assignment to do for your teacher. Your wife is demanding for the fourteenth time that you take out the garbage. Yes, that's all important. But there is something within you that is saying, "Seek His face." And that can be done even in the midst of writing the report and doing the homework and taking out the garbage. "Your face," he says, "O LORD, I will seek." I will listen to that voice, the voice of the Holy Spirit, who compels me to come to You. I will seek you. And he asks, "Do not hide Your face from me. Do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my helper." His father and mother forsake him. People all around him. Saul, who he thought was his friend, Joab his closest adviser, Absalom his son, they all forsook him. They all abandoned him. But he knows that the Lord will not. And even though all around him might abandon him, the Lord will receive him. And then he asks in verse 11, "Teach me Your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors. Because there are those who surround me who will, if I give them the opportunity, take advantage of my missteps to drag me down. Some might want to overthrow my kingdom, others to lead people in revolt, still others to betray us into the hands of the enemies of Israel. And they might do any of that if I give them the opportunity. So lead me in a straight path. Lead me in a godly path." "Lead me in Your way, O LORD," he says in verse 11. "Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence."

Once again, this is a man of the world who is surrounded by people who want to bring him down, but he knows that the Lord will not abandon him. And so he prays, "LORD,

do not abandon me.” Which of course he didn’t need to do because he knew the Lord wouldn’t do it anyway, so he was just going to take it for granted, right? That’s not the proper response? No, of course it’s not the proper response! Because that’s not what we do when we are in a relationship of love with another person. This morning, getting over here, I had to get in the car, which was not an exceedingly easy thing to do. I had to be driven over here. I had to be gotten out of the car, which was even more difficult. I was wheeled in here, so as to conserve my strength. I could use the crutches all the time but it wears me out. So Maryanne went and got the wheelchair and pushed me up the ramp. I don’t mind telling you that pushing 450 pounds of mud up that ramp is not an easy thing to do. I haven’t been able to weigh myself since all of this started. For all I know, I do weigh that now, but anyway, she pushes me up and she brings me in here and she got my Bible and she got my sermon notes and she got the autoharp and all that other stuff, and she helped me around. And all I had to do was snap my fingers. Isn’t that amazing? That would be pushing my luck. Because maybe we work that way with servants. If you’ve ever had servants, maybe you operated that way with them. Probably not, though, because you’re better people than that. But I know some people who probably work that way with servants. But if you work that way with your spouse, what’s going to happen? You’re very shortly going to find yourself single again. Because even though I don’t *have* to ask her to be of service to me, which she has been in countless ways over the last three and a half weeks, I do. I ask. I don’t presume. I ask. Because that’s what people who love one another do. They don’t presume on that relationship. They fill it out with acts of service. You all have no idea what I’m going to be doing once this thing comes off my foot. Because it’s going to be going the other way. Those acts of service are going to be going the other way. I guarantee it. And the interesting thing here is that David doesn’t, in expressing his desire to be taught things God’s way, ask specific directions. He doesn’t want a road map. He doesn’t want another commandment. What he wants is God’s wisdom. His wisdom for dealing with his enemies, His wisdom for dealing with his rule of Israel, His wisdom for dealing with his personal relationships with his family and friends. And the thing is, he’s not going to follow that wisdom in its entirety.

We hold David up sometimes as practically an Old Testament equivalent of Jesus, but he’s by no means that. This is a seriously flawed man in many, many ways. He’s not a paradigm of virtue and he’s not necessarily someone we should imitate. But there are things that he does right. And one of the things that he does right and that he urges upon us is to seek God’s wisdom, even as we seek His face. And in the process to be confident. In verse 13, “I am still confident of this.” The tone once again changes. His prayer is over and at this point I think he’s actually addressing Israel, the people for whom he writes this hymn. “I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.” Even in the midst of the darkness, even in the midst of his enemies, he will see the light and the salvation of God. But he won’t see it, necessarily, on his time table any more than we see God at work on our time table. And so he ends with this note: “Wait for the LORD. Be strong and take heart, [O people of God. That’s not in the text, but I think it’s addressed to the people of Israel.] and wait for the LORD.” And he’s addressing that to us, too.

Once again, if you'll indulge me for a moment to speak to my own situation, I prayed on the day of my surgery that I might receive a miraculous and instantaneous healing. That the surgeon would make his incision and discover that the x-rays were no longer correct and that my bones had been knitted together by the direct action of God. I was sorely disappointed when I woke up with this thing on my foot. And a lot of pain. And the warning that no, it's not a hundred percent yet. It's going to take time. And sometimes, maybe even most of the time, that's the way the Lord works. He works on His time table and He works through His means. And frequently those means are human means. And so I see a doctor and I take his direction. I do what he says and, God willing, a few weeks from now this thing will come off and I will moonwalk across the stage here and everyone will avert their eyes. But I will speak joyfully to the Lord because I will know that He has been at work in my life.

My light, my salvation, my stronghold and yes, ultimately, my healer. Praise God for His countless glorious gifts.