

**Pentecost 17 / September 24, 2023**

**Psalm 27:1**

**“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?”**

**The Lord is my light, life and salvation**

Psalm 27 is a psalm of David and is reflective of his times and experience as a warrior king of Israel. It was a time in which people lived and died by the sword. It was a time of great population migrations. People were forced from their homelands by climatic factors and in turn forced other people from their lands. These in turn would force their way into the lands of other people. Israel was one of those peoples. Their ancestors Abraham and Sarah migrated from beyond the Euphrates River into what was then, the land of Canaan. They migrated into the land of Egypt, because of a famine and lived there until the Lord brought them out of Egypt with divine power. They then took possession of the land of Canaan by the sword at the word of the Lord. Through warrior kings like David the Lord brought them into the Promised Land and protected them from their enemies.

Throughout their history Israel was threatened by other people who sought mastery over them and possession of their lands. The Philistines were Israel’s perennial enemy. As the bronze age morphed into the iron age, they had superior military technology. Israel had a lot going against it. They were surrounded by enemies. Despite the dangers around them and the enemies that surrounded them, the Lord preserved Israel as the people He chose to make His name known in the world. The Lord was Israel’s life, light and their salvation.

When Israel turned from the Lord to worship idols and serve false gods, the Lord gave them over to the hands of their enemies to bring them to repentance. When they repented, the Lord had compassion and sent Judges who rescued them through violence and with the sword. It was a violent time. The people of Israel and even the great King David were no match for the enemies that surrounded and advanced against them. Israel was preserved in the land of Promise because the Lord protected Israel. As David acknowledged in the psalm, the Lord was the stronghold of his and their lives.

We don’t live in the same kind of world and so the imagery of warfare and violence might be hard for us to relate to. I always feel a little squeamish when David sings about his adversaries and foes seeking to eat up his flesh. Maybe I take it too literally. We thank the Lord that we live in a time and place where images of warfare and violence are foreign to our experience and distasteful to our sensitivities. We thank the Lord that He preserved His people Israel through those violent times. Because if He hadn’t, there would have been no Israel to make His name known in the world. If there were no Israel there would have been no Jesus to be our Saviour. He is both a son of Israel and the offspring of David. He is the promised Messiah through whom the Lord brought life, light and salvation to the world. The Lord preserved His word and brought His people through the violence of those times, so that succeeding generations of Israel and countless generations of Gentiles would receive light, life and salvation through Christ Jesus and faith in Him as God and Saviour. The Lord is our light, life and salvation!

We do not live in the same world as Israel and David when he wrote this psalm, and yet we do. We don’t live in the Late Bronze, Early Iron Age, but we live in the same age of sin and death. Technology has changed. Sin, the devil and death remain the same. We don’t have to fear armies surrounding our cities and threatening to devour our flesh with the sword, though many do. But we have spiritual adversaries who do the same. We are thankful that the life conditions that affected Israel and David three thousand years ago don’t affect us today, though they continue to affect believers today in many parts of the world.

We are thankful, but in terms of spiritual warfare, of which David primarily is speaking, we have much to be aware of and to be on guard for. In Ephesians, St. Paul writes, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness.” An enemy unseen is more dangerous than one that is seen and identifiable as a clear and present danger. When David stared down Goliath who was armed with sword and shield, he knew the danger he faced. When David reclined in his palace and saw another man’s wife bathing one evening, he failed to appreciate the greater danger in his soul.

Truly the greatest enemies that assail us and the most dangerous battles are not with external enemies, or fought on fields of battle. The most dangerous battles are fought in our souls. The most dangerous enemies are of the spirit. The ways of the world, the devil and our own sinful nature. If we were ever demanded to publicly deny our faith in Christ under threat of death, as many martyrs were in the past and still are today, we would be less likely to deny Christ with our lips than we are in our hearts when we are tempted in private to sin. When Goliath charged

on the field of battle, David's faith was galvanized by the clear and present danger. He was strong because he knew his need and he knew the Lord, his life, light and salvation, was fighting for him. A clear and present danger focuses our faith on the Lord.

David needed the Lord to fight for him and with him. His faith was focused by a clear and present danger. He needed the Lord to be his life, light and salvation even more when he was tempted to adultery with another man's wife and to murder her husband through battle. He didn't appreciate the danger. He forgot the Lord. He lost the battle. We face many spiritual dangers in the course of any given day. The battle between good and evil is occasionally fought on the field of battle. It is fought every day in the human heart. We need the Lord to be our life, light and salvation. In the day of trouble, He will hide us in His shelter, cover us with His tent and lift us high on the rock of His steadfast love in Christ Jesus.

The Lord blessed David on the field of battle and in his reign as king over His people Israel. The Lord blessed David, not because of his sinlessness. He was a sinner like you and me and every human soul. As a warrior he sinned through the shedding of much blood. Which is why the Lord said his son Solomon would build the temple for His name. The Lord blessed David because He loved him. The Lord loved David by showing him his sin. The prophet Nathan confronted him with his sin against Uriah the husband of Bathsheba. David responded with repentance and turned to the Lord for forgiveness. He prayed, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions." The Lord is merciful. He stands beside us and fights for us in the time of testing. When we fall and fail the test, He provokes our spirits to repentance and raises us up in forgiveness. He blesses us with His Holy Spirit that we may continue to walk in the light of His love and salvation.

David's confidence on the field of battle and in the battle within his soul was that the Lord was on His side. Our confidence in the external and internal struggles of life is that the Lord is with us in kindness and love for the sake of Christ Jesus. We know the Lord is with us in kindness and love, because He has given His eternally begotten Son to share in our humanity and fight the greatest battle against sin, the devil and death for us. As St. Paul said in the letter to the Romans, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" If God gave Christ to die for us, how much more will He give us all things in Him, life, light and salvation.

Christ on His cross stared down, withstood and defeated the greatest enemies, empowered not by human weapons, but with the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit. On the cross Jesus remembered the psalms of David. Psalm 22, "You are He who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breast. On you was I cast from birth and from my mother's womb you have been my God." Through the word and by the working of the Holy Spirit, His heavenly Father supported Him throughout the battle until the war was won and He cried in triumph, "It is finished," and prayed in victory, "Father into your hands I commit my spirit." Because of Jesus, we know beyond the shadow of a doubt that the Lord is with us in and through all things in life to life everlasting. He is our life, light and salvation. In Christ, He will bring us into the light of everlasting life. In His name. Amen