

Title: A Royal Waste of Time
Biblical Text: Psalm 27
Teaching Series: Single Message
Preaching Date: May 19, 2024
Preacher: Jason C. Helveston

Psalm 27

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 evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: 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 inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord. Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek." Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in. Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out

violence. I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

A psalm is like music. It's like poetry. It should be read and even felt fully and experientially. So we don't zoom in on every word and line (like we do with a New Testament letter, perhaps); we zoom out. We widen our gaze to capture the whole picture a writer is painting with their words, emotions, and passion. That's not to say we don't learn truths about God's nature and character through the Psalms. We just learn them differently.

The shepherd-turned-king, David, is in a familiar space. It's familiar to any of us who believe in the God of the Bible. We've got truth in our heads and hearts. We've learned to trust God and his character. We've read our Bibles. We've heard sermons and sung songs. And yet ... despite what we know ... what we've heard ... what we've sung ... what we've experienced ... we face a new moment. We face a new or greater need, fresh suffering, or disappointment. We experience fresh criticism or adversity or sorrow. We find ourselves waiting, again. I think this is one of the hardest things about being a Christian: reading the truth of God in his Word and then waiting for that reality to show up in our lives and world.

David was in *that* space.

Jesus' disciples were in *that* space.

I think we're all in that space.

We're all waiting. Few things describe our faith better than waiting. The writer of Hebrews tells us our faith is "***the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen***" (Hebrews 11:1). In the big picture, we're waiting for Jesus to come back. Throughout our lifetime, we're waiting for flourishing and wholeness. Daily, we await peace, provision, joy, and help.

You see, the people of God are a people who *wait*.

To be a Christian is to wait.

But contrary to our widespread presumption, waiting isn't the absence of action. It's not apathy. It's not resignation or laziness. Waiting isn't a waste of time. When we zoom out, David is taking action. At the very least, we know that while David was waiting, he was writing. He was writing this psalm. However, we also see him take action in the content of his poem. Everything he says and does builds to a crescendo with a plea or proclamation. He builds to the last two verses, so look at them with me: ***Read Psalm 27:13-14 ... I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!*** In his waiting, David is commanding his soul to believe something. He's training his heart to be patient, strong, and courageous in God. By the end of this psalm, David seems like he's preaching to himself. More specifically, he's preaching the gospel to himself.

Theologian Jerry Bridges explains, “*To preach the gospel to yourself ... means that you continually face up to your own sinfulness and then flee to Jesus through faith in His shed blood and righteous life*” (*The Disciplines of Grace*, 59). That's what we ought to do while waiting. We out to face up and flee. We ought to preach the gospel to ourselves.

That's what I want to talk about today. I want to talk about waiting. And I want to talk about how we preach to ourselves while we wait. David gives us three ways to preach to ourselves as we wait on the Lord. He praises, confesses, and cries out to the Lord. So, that's how we'll organize our time ...

- *Praising* the Lord in our waiting. (vv.1-3)
- *Confessing* to the Lord in our waiting. (vv.4-6)
- *Crying* out to the Lord in our waiting. (vv.7-12)

[Prayer]

Movement 1: Praising the Lord in Our Waiting

(vv.1-3)

In his opening, David *praises* the Lord for his work and character. Notice in vv.1-3 how he speaks of who God is and what he has done in and for him. He says, *Read vv.1-3 ... 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 evildoers assail me to*

eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident. David speaks about the Lord as his light. His salvation. The stronghold of his life. It's all a very personal application of God's cosmic nature. To wait on the Lord, we have to know the Lord. Naming his nature and character gives David courage and hope in the middle of fear. But that's also what makes David's comments ironic. After all, when do we say things like.... *whom shall I fear? Of whom shall I be afraid?* Well, I think we tell ourselves not to be scared when there's a pretty good reason to be frightened. We tell ourselves and others we don't have to be fearful when we're battling fear. Remember, David is preaching to himself. So, this is, in many respects, aspirational. But not because this kind of fortitude and faith is out of reach, but because he's in the middle of it. He's waiting.

Then he looks back. He speaks about the past, about opposition and enemies who stumbled and fell when they tried to take him out (likely when King Saul was after him). And because he saw the Lord's faithfulness to him in those moments, he reminded himself ... *"my heart shall not fear"* ... and *"I will be confident"* ... *because of how God has revealed himself to me in the past and what God has already done in my life.* He preaches hope to himself by *praising* God!

When we're waiting, it's common to want encouragement. We want our spirits to be lifted. We want our bodies energized to stick with it. However, our modern view of encouragement is pretty enmeshed with our view of ourselves. For example, we

usually think the remedy to discouragement is self-assurance. Of course, there's some truth to that. However, the Bible teaches us that, more often, discouragement is the result of a preoccupation with self. Therefore, what lifts our spirits and empowers our bodies is praise. It's looking outside ourselves. It's looking to someone else. It's worship that encourages our souls. Because worshiping God puts everything in its proper place. Worship, writes Marva Dawn, "*equips [the] community with a sufficiently deep sense of itself in relation to God that it can go from its worship into the world to effect social change*" (*Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, 68-69). David is *praising* the Lord in his waiting because worship empowers us to wait well.

In our waiting, we *praise* the Lord.

Movement 2: Confessing to the Lord in Our Waiting

(vv.4-6, Psalm 90:17, Philippians 1:6; 2:13)

Praise inevitably leads to confession. We talk about this often. When we consider God, we instinctively consider ourselves. Now, usually, when we think about confession, we think about admitting or confessing sin. And that's good. We should do that. But it's incomplete. More broadly speaking, confession is about agreeing with God. It's about making ourselves vulnerable and known before him. As the Apostle John says, confession is stepping into and walking in the light so that we have real relationships with each other and God (see 1 John 1:7). So after praising, David confesses his deepest longings to the Lord. He steps in the light. Look at

vv.4-6. *Read Psalm 27:4-6 ... One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: 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 inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.* As he waits, David steps into the light.

He's preaching himself out of fear toward a renewed trust in the Lord by confessing his deepest desires.

David is really confessing that there's only one place where he's truly safe, protected, loved, and satisfied ... and where fear is driven away: the presence of the Lord. He wants to be with God. You see, though God is everywhere, David's asking for intimacy and relationship and face time. That's what he confesses while waiting. Notice all the metaphoric language David uses to describe the presence of the Lord.

- God's presence is a *house* of peace and provision.
- It's a *temple* of spiritual vitality.
- His presence is *shelter* that protects him from trouble.
- God hides David like a *tent*.
- The Lord's presence is like a *rock* that lifts David.

This is such a crucial thing to preach to ourselves while waiting. *Why?* Well, it's because usually, especially when we're waiting, we don't believe it. We don't want God's presence. We want whatever it is we're waiting for. *I don't want the Lord's presence ... I want a raise ... I want to be married ... I want children ... I want my own house ... I want this project to be done ... I want this sickness to be gone ... I want to be done with this shame and loneliness and judgment.* None of these are evil desires. They're really good things to desire. However, none are a house, temple, shelter, tent, or rock. Only the Lord's presence provides true and lasting security.

We need to preach this to ourselves. We need to confess this while we wait. We need to step into this light. David's confessing to the Lord to fortify his heart; to protect his soul from trusting in something that will only cause more harm.

In our waiting, we *praise* the Lord.

In our waiting, we *confess* to the Lord.

Movement 3: Crying Out to the Lord in Our Waiting **(vv.7-12)**

In many respects, vv.1-6 is a complete psalm. It includes every element most psalms incorporate. There's acknowledgment, praise, and gratitude for what God has done. If David finished here, it'd be a *testimony psalm*. Surprisingly, though, he keeps going and nearly turns the psalm into a lament. ***Read Psalm 27:7-12 ...***

Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek." Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in. Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.

Even after praising the Lord and confessing our desire for his presence, we can still get weary in our waiting. *Are you with me? It's easy to give up when God doesn't respond in the time or way we desire.* We do what C.S. Lewis described as doubting in the dark what we never questioned in the light. Or as Samuel Rutherford (17th century Scottish Presbyterian) puts it positively, ***"Christ charges me to believe His daylight at midnight."*** Now, that's hard. Let's put this in pandemic terms. Many of us were prone to doubt in quarantine what we would have never questioned pre-pandemic. *You see, in the midnight of our souls' desires, we're tempted to believe that the sun won't rise.* David says, *God, you told me to seek your face ... I'm seeking your face. You told me you'd hide me ... but it seems like you're hiding.* Notice how the tone shifts. Where there were once shouts of praise and confession, now there's ***crying out*** in desperation. The same person who remembered stories of divine deliverance now asks, *are you angry with me? Have you forgotten me? Are you done with me? Church, do you feel this?* It's too

relatable. There's this level of questioning some of the most fundamental aspects of the Heavenly Father's nature.

This is so human. This is what we do. This is what we're doing. In fact, if we're honest, we often take it a step further than David. You see, David is still talking to God. His *crying out* is still *to the Lord*. My brothers and sisters, I know some of you are so weary from waiting that you aren't even talking to God or listening to his voice anymore. I imagine the prospect of crying out even seems ridiculous and unhelpful, like it will do even more damage. Truth is, crying out is really uncomfortable. It's a posture of desperation. And we don't like to be seen as desperate or needy, *do we?* We'd rather keep our pride intact, go through the motions, and perhaps even act like we've stopped waiting. Or, instead, in our waiting, we give up by indulging ourselves in whatever pleasure seems most soothing ... sex, greed, manipulation, or whatever else will make the feeling of waiting stop—anything but crying out. *Crying out* is probably the most vulnerable action we take while waiting.

But even in the crying out, frustration, and questions ... David is still reaching for the Lord, listening for his voice, and longing for him. Unexpectedly, in crying out to the Lord, David keeps preaching to himself. He's still trusting that God will hear him.

In our waiting, we *praise* the Lord.

In our waiting, we *confess* to the Lord.

In our waiting, we *cry out* to the Lord.

Now, you may object. *There's no resolution. David is still waiting.* Well, the purpose of waiting is not to stop waiting. While this might seem like a waste of time in our flesh, Marva Dawn points us to the splendid nature of worship and waiting on the Lord. She says, "*To worship the Lord is—in the world's eyes—a waste of time. It is, indeed, a royal waste of time, but a waste nonetheless. By engaging in it, we don't accomplish anything useful in our society's terms ... Worship ought not to be construed in a utilitarian way. Its purpose is not to gain numbers for our churches to be seen as successful. Rather, the entire reason for our worship is that God deserves it* (A Royal Waste of Time, 1). One of waiting's greatest enemies is our commitment to pragmatism. Waiting on the Lord is not practical. But it does set things in order—between us and God. And it is transformational.

Waiting makes us more like Jesus.

You see, just before his crucifixion, Jesus was also waiting on his Heavenly Father. And in his waiting, we see praise, confession, and crying out. Luke records a particularly poignant moment. *Read Luke 22:41-44 ... And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great*

drops of blood falling down to the ground. Jesus comes to his Father, and he *praises* and honors him as Father. He *confesses* he desires to be with him and found in his will. He *cries out*, *if you are willing, remove this cup from me.* (The cup was the Father's wrath. It was his impending death. It was the reason he had come to earth.) But notice also that the Father doesn't speak. The waiting continues. The Father doesn't take the cup from Christ. And then, Jesus preaches to himself, *not my will but yours be done.* You see, the purpose of waiting isn't to stop waiting. Instead, angels came to strengthen Jesus.

Then he prayed more.

He suffered more.

And ... he waited some more.

In fact, now Jesus is at the Father's right hand ... waiting to return.

To be a Christian is to wait because right now, Christ himself is waiting.

You see, in our waiting, we need to zoom out. We need to step back and praises, confess, and cry out to Jesus—the one who waits with us. Because he endured, was strengthened, and waited ... we're not only encouraged in our waiting, but we have hope that we don't wait in vain. The writer of Hebrews says that because Christ was *Read Hebrews 9:28 ... "offered once to bear the sins of many, [he] will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him."* The purpose of waiting isn't to stop waiting. It's to be come more like Jesus. But, one day ... we won't need to preach this to ourselves anymore. Because one day, we will wait no more.

