

[INTRODUCTION]

I encourage you to turn over your Bible to Psalm 27, which we have just read moments ago. What is your biggest fear in life? Some people have fears over earthquake others over earthworm. Some are afraid of losing their job some other people are afraid of losing their family members. I learned recently that someone called 401k 101k because the stocks and mutual funds are greatly affected by the current economy. One of my fears is last minute change. I don't usually do well with things I haven't well prepared for. I had planned to preach on a different topic but when I pondered on the things happened these days and brothers and sisters are suffering from various difficulties I felt impelled to change the sermon. I seldom went to three hospitals within a week to visit different patients. Then there are people who are going through great difficulty that no one knows. I was leaving the Evergreen Fellowship on Tuesday and I asked God: how would you comfort those who are hurting? A voice came back immediately: why don't you preach on Psalm 27? I was in shock but I finally opened the Bible when I got home and checked what Psalm 27 is all about. I was greatly comforted by God's Word. So don't be surprised if you feel that the songs we sing didn't quite match with the sermon theme. Brother Garth didn't do anything wrong. The problem is with me.

Our fears in life have a lot to do with whom we trust. Do you trust God in good times and bad times? I hope that God will speak to those of you who are in fear at this stage in your life. Shall we begin our study with a word of prayer?

[EXPLANATION]

We are not sure at what stage in David's life Psalm 27 was composed. The title of the psalm doesn't give us additional information on that. But as you read Psalm 27 it is safe to say that David must have a close relationship with God through his life experience. Let us study this psalm from three angles.

1. Trust 信靠 (vv. 1-6)

From verse 1 to 6 we can see that the psalmist puts his total trust in the Lord. He begins the psalm with two rhetorical questions in verses 1 and 2 (**read**). The answers to both questions are: no one! Here the psalmist uses three descriptions to illustrate how precious God is to him. In verse 1 he says God is his light and salvation. Then in verse 2 he sees God is his stronghold.

A. Security 安全保障

Because God is the object of his complete trust the psalmist has a sense of security even if he is in the middle of his trouble. He uses four different terms to depict his adversaries: "evil men" and "enemies" in verse 2 and "army" and "war" in verse 3. Think of David; he was a shepherd boy turned into a mighty warrior. He knows exactly what he is talking about when he tells us that his adversaries are like wild beasts devouring on a defenseless sheep. And he knows for sure how it is like to be in a battle – you are either win or lose, which is to say you either kill your

enemy or you are being killed. However, even when facing the fiercest adversaries the psalmist has security in the Lord. In verse 3 he says: “my heart will not fear” and in verse 3 he adds: “I will be confident.” The Chinese translation has a better rendering of the word “confident” which means “to be secure.” 安穩/保障

B. Sincerity 誠心敬拜

Because of his trust in the Lord the psalmist can worship God in sincerity. In verse 4 the psalmist tells us that there is only one thing he desires. It is to “dwell in the house of the Lord” forever. Since the temple has not been built in David’s time the house of the Lord may refer to the tabernacle. From a military point of view the tabernacle is not most secure place. It is just a tent made of cloth. But to David the most secure place is in the presence of God. He doesn’t want to just visit there once in a while but to stay there for the rest of his life. In verse 5 the psalmist says that is where he will find safety and protection. It was as if God put him high on a rock. What does he do in such a situation? In verse 4 he says he will “gaze upon the beauty of the Lord” and “to seek Him.” Then in verse 6 he indicates that he will “sacrifice with shouts of joy” and will “sing and make music to the Lord.”

The psalmist says there is just one thing he asks and seeks after – it is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. If you can only have one wish is that the one thing you seek after, especially when you are in a difficult situation? Brother Mingqi shared with us in his email a very precious thing about Elder Steve He’s moving to the rehabilitation hospital. To cheer the patients up the doctors at that hospital asked the patients to write down their wishes and to put the banner on the wall so that they can see their wishes all the time. Mingqi told us that the first thing on Elder He’s wish list is to come back to worship on Sunday. Since he felt sick Elder He has missed Sunday worship twice. He regretted that he could not come and worship the God he loves in his spiritual home together with the people who care about him.

Of course what the psalmist speaks about is more than worshipping God in a church building. A broader meaning is to stay intimately in God’s presence. That is where his trust in the Lord is based. Even though he is surrounded by his adversaries he is still secure because God is with him.

2. Trial 試煉 (vv. 7-12)

If verses 1-6 can be described as faith in trust, verses 7-12 can be understood as faith on trial. From a song of assurance the psalmist turns to the Lord in prayer. What is upsetting his faith? His enemies are at the doorstep ready to strike him. Yes, he trusts that God has the mighty power to save him from danger. He has saved him before in other situations. But will God save him again this time?

A. Fact 面對現實

What does the psalmist do when his faith is under trail? First he has to face the fact. Verse 12 says “the false witnesses rise up against me.” His adversaries are right there attacking him. Worse still, he feels that God seems to be far away. In verse 9 he pleads God not to hide His face from him and not to reject or forsake him. This feeling of being abandoned may not be based on

fact but the feeling itself is very real. It is like some people are afraid of mouse. A mouse can do little harm to a human and the fact is the mouse is more afraid when it sees a human. The feeling of fear is not based on fact, however, the feeling itself is very real. But the psalmist shows us that he has to objectively evaluate the situation and be honest about his own feelings before he can jump out from the dark valley and turn back toward God in faith.

B. Faith 鼓起信心

He musters up his faith and pours out his heart before God. Listen to what his prayer is all about. On the positive end he asks the Lord to hear his voice, be merciful to him and answer his prayer (v.7). He also pleads God to teach him His path and to lead him in a straight path (v. 11). On the negative end he demands God not to turn him over to his enemies (v. 12). Even though he may feel that God is away by faith he determines to lift up his prayers to the Lord. In verse 8 he expresses the desire to seek God's face. The word "seek" here is the same word used in verse 4 when the psalmist says there is one thing he seeks after in life. Some people may ridicule Christians for failing to face the reality and put their trust in an invisible God. The truth is, faith is not ignoring the fact but on the contrary it helps us to face the fact from God's perspective.

I have the permission from sister Yu Mei Lee to share the testimony written by her daughter Suzy. It describes her emotional journey when sister Lee was diagnosed with gall bladder cancer. At that time seven physicians confirmed that it was cancer. The cancer specialist predicted that sister Lee has a 5-year survival rate of 7 %. That means out of 100 patients with the same disease only 7 of them live past 5 years. Suzy was greatly depressed by such a grim prognosis. After crying for the first day then she said: "I did the only thing I know to do when in pain – I turned to God." She found hope in **Ps. 118:17**: "I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done." 我必不至死，仍要存活，並要傳揚耶和華的作為。 She felt that God had a special message to her mom from this verse. Sister Lee is the only person among her family of 10 children (all living) who is a Christian. Suzy knew that her mom can use this illness to witness to her family. Not only did she pray she also sent out emails to everyone she knew in the whole world asking for prayers. There were over 11 churches and groups of people praying for her mom. Two days after the specialists announced that he was 99 % sure of cancer the MRI indicated no sign of cancerous tumor. At the operation table sister Lee was treated as if there was still cancer. The gall bladder was taken to obtain a definitive biopsy result during the surgery. It came back negative. It was indeed a miraculous healing. Suzy concludes his testimony this way: "I believe in miracles; I believe in the power of prayer; and I believe He has a plan for each of you. Now what are you facing today that God can't handle?"

3. Triumph 得勝 (vv. 13-14)

The inner struggle of the psalmist comes to sharp turn in the last two verses. His faith has triumphed. The translation in the NIV for verse 13 is closer to the original script than the Chinese Union Version. The New Chinese Version is somewhat similar to the NIV: 我還是相信，在活人之地，我可以看見耶和華的恩惠。 The key word here is "still." Regardless of the situation the psalmist makes up his mind to still trusting the Lord. The phrase "the land of the living" can be understood as "this life." The psalmist has faith that he will continue to see the goodness of God in his lifetime. To say the psalmist's faith has triumphed may not mean that his problem has been

solved, for that does not require faith anymore. Our faith in God helps us to focus not only on the hardship but it also helps us transcend beyond the hardship and still see God's goodness. James encourages us in **James 1:2-4**: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." Here the word "perfect" has the connotation of mature. Through trial our faith can mature and triumph.

In the last verse of the psalm the author reminds himself and encourages us to "wait for the Lord." That is a common encouragement in the Bible. A familiar occurrence of the word is in **Isaiah 40:30-31**: "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

Sooner or later when our faith is on trial we have to make a decision of whether or not we will continue to put our trust in the Lord. It is easier to say we trust God when we have other things to rely on. I trust that God will provide for my needs because I have this much of savings in my bank account. I trust that God will give me good health when I am still young and have no visible disease. What if God takes away all those things that bring a limited sense of security? It is like peeling off layer of scales on an onion until the core is exposed; then you know what your faith is really based upon. It is either the stuff you can see and hold on to, or God Himself.

Let me conclude with a story I heard on the Christian radio just a few days ago. A man named Barry whose wife of 28 years of marriage passed away. His wife had excellent health condition before she felt sick. But she died in a span of just 4 months. It was a Friday when the doctor announced that this patient might not live very long. The family spent time together on Saturday then she passed away on Sunday afternoon. This loving mother left 4 children to her husband – three grown up children who have left home and a young daughter of 10. This father asked all the questions any person would ask: why did God take away his wife and why did God leave him with this young daughter? But then he was hit head on with another important question: do I love Jesus with all my heart? This was his response to God: "God, I know you love me and I can trust myself to you." Two truths sank into his heart – God is great and God is good. He also understood a very important principle. In his own words he said: "If you don't have that resource under you at that moment you can't create it. You either have it or you don't have it at that point." Whether He is your God or He is not. It is that simple. It is that real.

If you are not a Christian where do you put your trust when hardship comes? Our Lord Jesus Christ is able to give you strength and grace if you would put your trust in Him. He is not an 800 help desk number that you only call on Him when you are in trouble. He desires to be the Lord of your life. First you have to admit that you are a sinner and there is no way to get rid of your sin by your own power. Then you have to believe that Jesus is the one true God and He died for your sin on the cross. Finally you tell Jesus that you are willing to accept Him as your Savior and Lord of your life. Any Christian friend sitting here today can give you help if you are not completely sure about what I have just said.

For the Christians here who are facing difficulty in life God is saying to you: fear not! Trust Him. Wait on Him.