

Wait for the Lord

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] I would like this evening for a little while just to look back at Psalm 27 on page 460 of your Pew Bible. Another Psalm of David and again not a specific historical context given to us for the Psalm as many other parts of the scripture will have that clear historic context but it could refer to many of the dangerous situations that David as king found himself in when he was opposed, when he was betrayed, when he faced enemies now very often of course in the Old Testament his enemies were physical enemies, physical enemies against God's people, against the people of Israel, people of Judah and the enemies he speaks about are spoken of in these terms but we can take these references he has and we can parallel them to the different spiritual enemies that we face in our lives as Christians so the Psalm is really written into a context of battle or struggle and difficulty, faces evildoers, adversaries and foes, armies come up against, he is able to speak in a sense personally about the armies against the people of God and he takes them almost per se, encamp against him representing him as the king of his people and his spiritual response to that.

And so I want to apply that in the same way for us in our Christian lives because as I said this morning I believe we're all struggling and we're all in a spiritual battle that's what we're promised. There may be the occasional mountain top experience for us, there may be times when things are going well but generally for us we face in our Christian lives the life of faith is a life of battle, it's a life of struggle, it's a life of opposition against our own hearts which find it easy to not believe against opposition externally from an unbelieving world and a very direct spiritual opposition from the evil one. And so it may be that some of you will have come here tonight and I don't doubt that that will be the case, that some of you will have come really struggling as Christians. It may have been months since you last prayed, maybe weeks since you last opened the Bible apart from in church just because you know everyone else opens the Bible in church so you think maybe it's the kind of thing you ought to do. Maybe you haven't felt any kind of spiritual vibrancy or life for a long time and the battles that you face are very private. You don't feel you can share them with anyone which is kind of what we were looking at this morning, really important to do, really important to not be battling and struggling on your own, important not just simply to rely on the weekly sermon, good, bad or indifferent though it may be, important though they are, it's very significant for us to learn from say a something like this about the principles of dealing with battle and what we're to do and what we must do in our Christian lives on a daily basis. Probably what we must, all of us must do all the time, every day, no matter how we feel so that we have this relationship of faith with the living God and the great thing about these Old Testament Psalms is how wonderfully relevant they remain to us in our New Testament understanding both in their prophetic insights and in the expressions of the life of faith that David was able remarkably to give. So if there was a theme we would be waiting on the Lord, trusting in the Lord, the last two verses repeat that, wait for the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage, wait for the Lord, trust in the Lord and really it's a cry, it's an invitation that goes out to all of us this evening as you will go from here, as you will go into the week to which we've already entered, that it will be a week in which you will trust in the

Lord despite what might be going on in your life. Focus on the Lord. The first couple of verses of the Psalm, David is just reminding himself of why he needs to weigh on the Lord.

The Lord is his light and his salvation. It puts things immediately into perspective, it brings in the darkness of his experience a sense of the reality of his relationship with God. 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? Now there's a really good film and I can't remember what it's called, it's just come into my head just now. Now all you film buffs will all know. It's about a family who've got a safe room in the house, a kind of solid, secure room where they can go when the house has been broken into and it's a story of a house being broken into and they go into the room. It doesn't sound like a very exciting film but it is, it's a really good film. Can anyone remember what it's called? Panic Room. Panic Room, that's the one. Panic Room, it's a great film and it's just really exciting but it's exactly the kind of picture that's used here of a stronghold. You know that God is our stronghold, he's our panic room. That's where we go. But not just kind of to escape when things are difficult but he's to be, that's to be where we live our lives in a spiritual panic room, in his presence, in his company. We focus on the Lord, the Lord is my light and my salvation. So here is the setting of the Psalm where the Psalmist is in the context of fear, in the context of unremarkable odds or difficulty, opposition where it seems that there's no way forward for him. He remembers that the Lord is his light and his salvation and that is a hugely significant focus that we take and that we remember as we go from here. When you sit at the Lord's table, when you participate in the Lord's table, you're reminding yourself of this Old Testament Lord, Jehovah, Lord that is written here in small capitals, L-O-R-D. This is Yahweh, God, this is the Lord who reveals himself in this personal way to save his people, the Lord who came to the people in Egypt, the Lord who came and redeemed his people and who saved them in this covenant relationship. I am your God, you are going to be my people. I will be with you, I will remain with you and that's the Lord who is our light, that is our guide and revelation to us of truth and of righteousness and who is our saviour and a redeemer and that's a good focus for us to have as we go into the lives that we face and you need to remind yourself of that. Every day the Lord is your light and your salvation as a Christian. The

Lord, you know, repeat that for yourself. The Lord is your light, is your guide, he's the one that's taken you from darkness and he is your salvation, he's redeemed you, he's forgiven you, he's paid the price for your sins. It's hugely significant and hugely important that our focus as Christians is on him. It's relational, it's personal, it's a divine appointment that we have with God. The Lord is to be our focus. Don't focus in your life on your battles and on your struggles and on your career and on your feelings because they are fickle. They go up and down each day. On your circumstances, focus your Christian life on the Lord. That is on the relationship you have with the Lord who is your light and your salvation. It's a tremendously important focus that we take into this week. He is the Lord of creation, he's the Lord of redemption, he's the Lord of time, he's the Lord of history and he is our Lord. So the focus must be on Jesus Christ. Take that with you. I don't care who you are, take it with you. There's no better focus and relationship to have as you go into this week. Whether you go into a difficult business week, you go into a difficult studying week, travelling week, whatever it might be, take the Lord with you. May your focus be on him and may it be a concentrated focus, particularly in the battles that you have in life. One thing I have asked of the Lord that I will seek after and this waiting on the Lord that's repeated twice at the end of the Psalm is a reminder of where David's focus and concentration was. It's this one thing, this is one thing that matters. It's this one thing that must be our focus and the difficulties and the battles and the struggles will always be there but if our loyalties are divided, we will always find ourselves struggling. If our focus as believers isn't entirely on the Lord, if we are divided between

[10:19] Christ and me, that is Christ and you, not Christ and me, Christ and you, if it's half hearted focus, if it's part time focus, then we struggle and we'll struggle with the battles and the difficulties and the opposition and the sin that's in our own hearts. If you have a foot in two camps, half and half with the Lord and really half and half, simply fulfilling your own desires and giving in to your own temptations so that you're half the time repentant and half the time just battling and struggling with that, then it will always be hugely problematic for you. In Christ alone our hope is found and that truth is clearly elucidated here that David's focus and the battles and the struggles that he was facing was singular. He had one, a unitary focus, one thing he was asking, one thing he looked for was that relationship with God and that glorifying of God in his life and the impossibilities that he was facing on a day to day basis and the same must be true for us. King David and us, it doesn't really change and our lives are to be focused in this way. And how does that outwork itself? How do we focus on the Lord in this way? How will you do that tomorrow?

How will you live as a Christian in other words? So really what we're looking at tonight is very basic stuff. It's the basic stuff that will help I hope. We'll at least remind you, if we want to help, it'll at least remind you of what's hugely significant and important in our lives. Focusing, waiting on the Lord, being strong, waiting on the Lord we're told twice there, David gives clues in the psalm. One is that we wait before him in prayer. Okay, that's very obvious. Verses 7 to 12, we've got the prayer of David, hero Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me. You have said, seek my face. My heart says to your face, do I seek? Hide not your face from me. Turn your servant away. Do not turn your servant away in anger. So part of that is there's a repentant spirit here. He's looking to be forgiven and for the anger of God to be appeased. So he's maybe dealing with his sins of his own heart and that's a hugely significant things in our life that we are coming to God daily in prayer. I love many people and I know it from my own heart.

I have many people who will come up past the line and say I'm really struggling as a Christian. I'm struggling to believe it all. I'm struggling to keep going. I'm struggling with the truth.

I'm struggling with science. I'm struggling with apologetics. I'm struggling with the opposition. Say, when did you last pray? And that's not a pious kind of response. It's not a pious comment to make, but the, you know, it's like waking up in the morning and your face is blue. You're struggling. Someone will say, well, when did you last breathe?

We need to breathe to live. We need to pray to live. Spirit is absolutely fundamental. So the psalmist here, rather than you coming to church and receiving something from church and from the word and then going away to somehow hope that you'll limp on or continue until next week when you come to church again and you're among Christians and the word is open and someone's doing the work for you and opening scripture, rather than doing that, we find what the psalmist is reminding us here is he's teaching us what we can do to live spiritually, to live, to breathe spiritually, you know, that famous statement, give a man a fish and give a man a fish and you will give him a meal. Teach a man to fish and he will eat for the rest of his life. That's my paraphrase of that particular well-known proverb, you know what? But it's right, isn't it? If you give a man a meal, it just feeds him once. If you teach him how to fish or kill animals, then he'll have good food for this. And that's what the psalm is doing. It's saying, don't come to church and be told about how to pray and pray with the minister and with other people there and then live the rest of your life as a practical atheist. He's saying, don't do that. He says, we are to be people as we wait on the Lord as we hear his voice and his voice says, seek my face. That's what

[15 : 26] God says to us, seek my face. Look for me. Look for that relationship with me. Look for that place where you're in my company. Make time for that to happen in your life and seek him. Seek him and cry aloud to him. He's gracious to us and he answers us in our lives. That isn't a great model that you can all go from here with that. You know, how do I wait on the Lord? Well, you wait on the Lord. I wait on the Lord in the simple way by speaking to him, by going to him with our cries, by crying aloud to him. If you can go to a place where you can cry aloud to God, all the better. Walk apart their seat and at the top of that, you can cry aloud to God. Sometimes it's good to cry aloud to him verbally, loudly and not just with the quietness and privacy of our own hearts and minds, but cry out to him.

Plead in the battles that you face. If you're dry and dull and dead spiritually, if you haven't prayed for weeks and that's a struggle then to go back to it, learn that struggle again. Go to the place, physically go and spend time in his company and plead with him about the dryness and the battles and the struggles that you face. Plead for his mercy and know that he will never leave us, nor forsake us. The Lord takes us in. There's some beautiful mixed metaphors and pictures in the Psalm about home, which we'll look at briefly. It's very important that we learn from the Psalmist here about that most basic of all, most fundamental of all spiritual disciplines. Ministers are privileged because that's our job, we do that, that's what we have to do. It's what's our privilege to do. It's because we panic, we can't do anything else. It's an absolute struggle for us and so we're driven to prayer. But it always amazes me how many Christians I meet who don't pray regularly, who don't spend time with God and they're choking, they're draining the very life out of them because it's that channel to him. It's that channel to his company and to his strength, to his forgiveness and to his grace. So we're to be people who wait on the Lord in prayer very practically, but also wait on the Lord in his company, which is broader than just prayer, I think. The New Testament talks about praying without ceasing. Does that mean we spend all our time on our knees? No, I don't think it does. And that doesn't mean we're always conversing with God, but there's the sense in which we wait on the Lord by simply being in his company. And David speaks about it here in an Old Testament way. One thing I've asked of the Lord, I'll seek him, I mean, 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. Now you know in the Old Testament the temple was the place where God's presence was symbolically present. He was there, you know, the Ark of the Covenant, the Shikhaina glory. God was where the temple was among God's people. That's where God was. And that's what David is referring to. He's wanting to be not really on the battlefield. He's wanting to be in the house of the Lord. He's wanting to be gazing upon the beauty of God and serving Him and inquiring of Him in his temple, the place where God was. Now what we've done, what have we done with that? We've taken that and we've said, that's church. No, it's not, it's not church. The New Testament church building, St. Columbus isn't the New Testament, the Edinburgh version of the Old Testament temple. We don't come to church to meet with

God. God's with us before we get to church. God's with us when we leave church. We come to worship Him, but sure, we come to sense His presence with His people. Absolutely. We come to give Him praise and glory. Of course we do. But we are people in whom God dwells.

We are the temple in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit lives in us. So there's a kind of reversal of roles here. God doesn't come in to the temple and the people come to Him.

[20 : 14] God lives in us and we are with God all the time and it's recognizing that Old Testament truth in our New Testament lives that we are to wait on the Lord by knowing His company is with us. So that, you know, there's this great, sacred secular divide, possibly, pietistic religion where we come and we do our worship. We worship in church and then we go away and we live our lives. And it's one of the dangers of the six and one of setting apart the Lord's day as a sanctified special day. But that's fine. But actually the other six are sanctified and special too. Seven days are His. And the danger is thinking one day is the Lord in the sixties. I just do for a mile. You know, I do my work and I fulfill my ambition and I don't need to think much about God for the rest of the time. But here is this reality of David waiting on the Lord by looking and desiring His company. And this is clearly a statement of desire for Him. Heart religion. This is what He longed for.

And that's what we are to, waiting on the Lord is about longing for recognizing that He is with us in everything that we do. And it's something that we seek after in nobles.

And I'm saying, kind of maybe I'm repeating myself because I'm going thinking the same kind of things just now. But it ennobles your work. It ennobles your 24-7 what you're doing. It doesn't mean that the only people that are important are church people or church leaders or what happens in the church for the gospel. The gospel matters where you are.

You're the people who are out there with the gospel, living out the gospel with Christ's company, the Holy Spirit, the temple walking around in your office and in your workplace and in your home and in your company. And that is how we are to look at waiting on the Lord. It's a lifelong reality for us. You know, all the days of my life, David says, that's what I want to do. He's kind of got a New Testament longing here. He's even got maybe a post New Testament longing. All these of his life that he would be in the presence of the Lord. And that is that that perseverance. Do you find that there's lots of times in your life where you think, okay, that's me. I've done my bit for the Lord. And now this is my own time, my own downtime, special me time. Well, when we understand the beauty of the Lord, we don't really want that me time. Well, we do, but it's it's it's life to the full time, which is me time, but it's me time with the Lord God himself. And it's a picture of gazing on his beauty. That's the true understanding of waiting on the Lord.

It's not a perfunctory act. It's not a religious act. It's an act of love and of true desire recognizing the beauty of the Lord. And for the guys here, that may sound a little bit effeminate. And I know, and I've said this before here that I had guys in my old church who were welders and who were working offshore and some of them struggled with the language of the Bible about loving Jesus, stuff like that, because it didn't seem very manly. Now, I think that can be legitimate. And we certainly don't want to speak in terms of kind of soft and sappy love affair type language as men. And I'm sure even as women, you don't want to do that. Because when we speak about the beauty of the Lord, it's not in sensual terms that speaking of the beauty of the Lord, speaking of the beauty of who he is of the beauty of his justice, the beauty of his order, the beauty of his creation, the beauty of his forgiveness, the beauty of him putting right the wrongs in our life for taking the chaos, the ugliness and darkness of the chaos of our sin and making it beautiful and right of redeeming relationships that are broken. You know, manliness, we can take that, can't we? In our manliness. We can take wrong relationships being put right. We can in a manly way and in a womanly way recognize the importance of facing up to division and hurt and pain that's in our lives by dealing with it in a godly and in a Christ-like way. That's beautiful. And that is what is being spoken of here. He sees and he knows and experiences that to be in the Lord's company, to react in the Lord's way in the everyday battles that you're going to face tomorrow, maybe I'll face, but you certainly will because you're on the front line. When you react to them Christ's way, then that's where we see the beauty because you see in the midst of impossibility, you see answers. And that's beautiful. And you see God intervening in your ordinary life. That's beautiful. That's good. And that is what is glorifying to God. And it's something that we seek to do. We wait in his company and I think we also wait just by serving him. It's a kind of broader implication I think of being in the temple of the Lord and being a servant in the temple of the Lord. And that simply by our obedience, I think, you know, we're to be living sacrifices and that waiting on the Lord is about our obedience. And again, our obedience in the everyday things. Now you will say, well, where does that affect me? Well, if you're being mean to the person that you know, beside you, who's a Christian, if you've spoken badly about them without justification, if you've gossiped, whatever it might be, there's little things every day that we will be challenged about that will bring us to obedience rather than disobedience, honesty, the way we deal with our wages, the way we deal with our employees, the way we speak in the canteen, all of the ordinary things of life. We wait upon the

[27 : 03] Lord when we honor him by obedience. And when we do so, what is it that we see? Well, I think we see the conclusion of the Psalm, which is I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. It's a great, it's a great statement. He may well have been facing kind of death at this point. And yet he had this great testimony of belief and faith that he, God would redeem him and that he would see God. It's a bit like Job's great statement of faith, you know, that in my flesh I will see God. And that hope and that reality and that expression of faith is very real. And I believe that as we wait upon the Lord in prayer and in his company and in service and obedience, then we know his goodness here. You know, we shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. We will, you might not see it tomorrow, but I believe we will. We will see his goodness and we will know his goodness. We will have answered prayers. Our life should be a waterfall of answered prayers. And I'm sure it is. Sometimes we're just too blind to see it. As we wait on him, there is blessing for us. Not a life of ease, not a life free from battles and struggles and difficulties and opposition and adversaries. And it may seem like a whole camp is encamped against us, but we will know and see his blessing.

And I believe not just in this life, but also in the life that is to come. Our future beyond the grave, beyond the intermediary state, shall I say, before Christ's return, beyond that we have this great land of the living to hope for. It's wonderful resurrection, live life, joyful, glorious life that is what's spoken of in Revelation. No more tears and no more darkness, no more separation, all of that, all in the context of fruitfulness and bounty and the exploration and joy and love and happiness beyond the grave. Wait on the Lord. And that's what we are to do. We are to be people who are strong and who take courage and who wait upon the Lord. It's kind of like a soldier's motto because we are in a battle just now. And I think it's a very important one for us. Sometimes when we hear about difficulties, we can shirk away from them. I really don't want that. I just want an easy life. Sure, we all think that. But the reality is there isn't such a thing as an easy life, but there is such a thing as a blessed life and a life where God will take us through. And we are to wait on the Lord. It's 1 Corinthians 16, 13 says, Be on your guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be people of courage. Be strong. Do everything in love. That's the kind of New Testament version of the Psalm and of this closing verses.

And may it be that we do that individually, that you will do that. I will do that. And when else can do it for you? You're individual soldiers in the Lord's army, but we're also soldiers in an army and we're strongest when we link together. And so the temptation might be to be divisive, to be separatist, to be isolationist, to be above dependence. But the rallying call from God's word is that together we wait on the Lord and together we take courage and we're strong. And together, secondly, we wait on the Lord. I hope that that is an encouragement to people who this week may have come to church thinking, this is the last time I'm coming to church. Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, may it be that we look out for one another in the battles and struggles of life. So easy for us to say, Well, I don't think they had much of a faith anyway. I'm not surprised they've drifted from the faith.

May we not be judgmental like that. May we not be holier than that. May we not be separatist. May we not judge others. But may we be people who wait upon you and who encourage each other to wait on you. May we do that. It's really hard to be courageous in our own. It's much easier to be courageous with others. And we ask that you would help us as a congregation to be courageous together. We go into new days, Lord, days when the church continues to grow and doubtless as it grows, we will face spiritual opposition. We will face the evil one. He will not be pleased and content or happy with a church that's growing. And his prime standard of attack is usually internal division, separation, disharmony. That's where he finds most success. Lord, protect us. We pray. Give us courage. Give us single-mindedness to focus on you. May we not be in two camps. May we not be half-hearted Christians. May we not just almost have our faith like an insurance policy for the future, but really living lives on our own without your company, without your fellowship, without prayer, without your word. Forgive us for being distracted by our own ambitions, by our own beauty, or by our own youth, or by our own independence. And help us rather to, as we saw this morning, go and recognise our bankruptcy, and in so doing receive the wonderful provision of the check that Christ writes out in his own blood for our redemption and for our healing and for our hope and for our future. So Lord be with us as we pray. In Jesus' name, amen.