
Taking Sons and Daughters to Church

Psalm 27

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Introduction

Many of you have teens, and many of them will attend college... so what are they in for? In perhaps what is one of 2007's saddest pairings of words, I heard for the first time the phrase or title, "atheist chaplain." A recent winter holiday report from NPR documented the growing trend on college campus to make available spiritual guides for atheists and humanists. The chaplain interviewed for the story was employed at Harvard, a university whose founding intent was to ensure that the Church was not full of illiterates – that is, Harvard's mission was to prepare people to benefit from and contribute to the work of the church by giving them education. Yet today, this highly influential institution is in many ways a major contributor to forces which would seek to *undo* the Church. Atheist chaplains being a recent development in this effort. Make no mistake that the public system of higher education will do little to protect its future students, your children, from very progressive secular views. Spirituality may be "in," but, doctrine, sound teaching, orthodoxy, and religion, especially, are "out."

In reality, however, that may matter very little. The mold may have been filled and its contents hardened long before college arrives. Recent and trustworthy surveys providing us with accurate representations of high-schoolers in the United States today, indicate that while the idea of church and God are very much alive in the minds of the majority American youth, what it all *means* is a far cry from what the Bible teaches.

Here is a summary of what teens in the U.S. tend to say about their religion, you could think of it as mini-creed¹:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on Earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

One researcher has coined this religion as moralistic therapeutic deism. If these five statements seem rather bland and non-specific, that's because they are. Worse, they pass in

¹ Smith, C. (2005). *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford Press, New York.

many places for good doctrine. Let me say with certainty, that a life built on tenants such as these is the house built on sand, it will not sustain in the storms of life².

So what does this all mean? Before we go any further, hear a bit of Psalm 27, the author states this,

“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?...One thing I have asked of the Lord...that I may dwell in the house of the Lord.

This type of courage and bravery, this bold confidence, clear certainty, firm assertion is a far cry from the quiet mumbles often eked out by teens and young adults among their peers. From the same study mentioned earlier, here are a few sentences cobbled together of summary statements made by youth during interviews about matters religious:

Religion? It’s not a big deal, it’s just how I was raised – it’s not worth fighting about but it is good for lots of people. I mean it’s there, but it’s not what I’m really into. I’m not really sure how to explain what I believe... I do believe there is a God and stuff and religion is really important to me, I guess, but I’m not too religious. Besides, who am I to judge – it’s not like there is one right answer. It helps me feel good – but you don’t have to be religious to be good³.

The difference between what David declares, even pronounces as truth, and what we often allow to dribble out is the difference between contemplating the four ounces of water in a glass at breakfast and standing on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean. The one will wash a pill down into our guts, the other can instantaneously wash 230,000 people away into eternity (witness the December 2004 Tsunami in Southeast Asia). The differences are vast and we must understand why.

Do I really want my children to be they type of people who make more of God and his glory than anything else in their lives? Or, do I feel it is best that moralistic therapeutic deism characterize their lives so that they do not “stick out” too much and things go well for them. Assuming that we hunger for both ourselves and our children, to be gripped by the type of conviction that David expresses in the first verse of Psalm 27, we must ask ourselves, how was it that David was able to say what he did here? That question will be the focus of our study this morning as we work to bring the light of Psalm 27 into the darkness of this world. Let’s pray [PRAY].

Series Review

As you know, we are in the midst of our 2008 Family Enrichment Conference. This year we are focusing on helping parents with spiritual formation in the home. Last Sunday Pastors Russ and Greg discussed leading your child to Christ. This morning the title of our sermon is

² Matthew 7:24ff

³ Smith, C. (2005). *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford Press, New York. pp. 118-155.

Bringing Sons and Daughters to Church, so please turn in your Bible to Psalm 27. This evening Pastor Russ will bring practical applications that will help parents think through what it is they can do to help their children as it relates to church. In Psalm 27, we'll be considering how we are to biblically regard church. This message might be summed up in one expression that goes like this: David displays an emboldening confidence that is grounded in the experience of the holy, that is sustaining in difficulty, that is learned through instruction, and that is fulfilled in hope.

An Emboldening Confidence (vv. 1-3)

[Read Psalm 27:1-3] We don't know for sure under what circumstances David penned this Psalm. One commentator has suggested⁴, and his case has merit, that it may have been soon after David first fled from Saul. You may remember David and Jonathan's secret code for communicating (where the arrows landed) and that David first fled to a priest in the city of Nob by the name of Ahimilech. Ahimilech assisted David in his flight with food and weapons – but a spy was lurking in the wings. Doeg the Edomite reports to Saul what he had seen. Ahimilech and all of his family are murdered by Saul for helping David. News of this gets back to David and he now knows that he is on the run. Hence a great and prolonged trial begins in David's life.

Whether or not this is the exact context of this Psalm we cannot know for certain, but what we can know, and probably more important to know, is that David is undergoing severe hardship and suffering. His life is pulling apart at the seams and the stakes, from a human perspective, are very high (hence verses 1-3 and 7-12).

Pause for just a moment, and reflect on what prolonged danger, fear, anxiety, difficulty, and uncertainty usually expose in us. As the vice of life tightens what comes out? Masks and facades pop off, loose screws rattle, weak joints and supports creak, and the very stuff of which we are made may shutter like a leaf in the wind. Often we become extreme in our thoughts and behavior – David was no exception. Keep in mind that shortly after leaving Ahimilech, David, out of raw fear, assumes the role of a madman to avoid being detained by Achish King of Gath.

Yet even in the midst of this what do we hear from the lips of David in the first three verses of this Psalm? Of God, he says he is light, salvation, and his stronghold. Of fear, he says he will not tolerate it. And of his enemies he says they will fall. Perhaps David *is* truly mad. He is running across the open country, begging for food and weapons, and ends up in a cave with 400 social rejects – while Saul the great king hunts him like a wild animal. Where is the light? Where is the salvation? Where is the stronghold?

How do you answer these questions? Your answers may expose a great error in our own hearts that often cripples the Christian in hard times. Where is light? David is in a dark cave. Where is a salvation? David is running from a man with great resources whose sole mission is to kill him. Where is the stronghold? David is on the side of a mountain, he's in a forest,

⁴ Spurgeon, C. *Treasury of David*.

he's begging bread. If you answer this way – setting forth the obvious absences of what we would consider the worldly equivalents of light, salvation, and stronghold, you are not thinking as a Christian. How does the Bible answer these questions? Where is light?

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:4-5).

Where is the salvation? Simeon, upon seeing the baby Jesus in the temple proclaims, by the Spirit,

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation... (Luke 2:29-30).

Where is the stronghold?

Christ Jesus... who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light... (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

Put your youth in David's context... Is this how they would respond? If not, where do they learn such a response?

Note that David says no less than what we have just stated in verses 1-3 – “The Lord is my light and my salvation... The Lord is the stronghold of my life...” You see, difficulty opens up and lays bare the connection that either does exist or does not exist between what we say we believe and what we believe. Watch your youth closely in their next struggle, particularly if it elicits fear – in our culture and times, it is not fear of being slaughtered by a king who hates your guts, it is fear of rejection, fear of losing status or position, fear of appearing the fool... or put more commonly, peer pressure. Put more biblically, fear of man, just like David.

Personal example: gf and taco bell

As my mother use to consistently say to me as a teen: We don't live what we profess, we live what we believe. Faith will bear the fruit of faith, just as an orange tree will bear oranges.

Will the believer be perfectly free of anxiety or fear when faced with trouble? No. I believe that will only come when we stand face to face with Christ himself. So the believer may stumble – but will the believer fall? Will the believer finally be overcome by their enemies? From behind the shield of faith, the loud and resounding answer given by the believer is, NEVER! The enemy may destroy my body, but he will never destroy my soul because if God is for us, who can be against us⁵? Dear church, this is faith in its most real state, standing against all that would oppose God's people in their godly work. This is belief in the promises of God in an obeying way. Calvin summarizes this well for us:

Nor assuredly do we ascribe due homage to God [We plainly do not give God the glory and loyalty due him], unless, trusting to his promised aid, we dare to boast of the certainty of our safety. Weighing, as it were, in scales the whole power of earth

⁵ Romans 8:34

and hell, David accounts it all lighter than a feather, and considers God alone as far outweighing the whole... David, therefore, intimates, that when the trial comes, his faith will prove invincible, because it relies on the power of God⁶.

Such faith does not make us bold for our own progress and well-being – as those who are perverse enough to suggest that the gospel is about our own best life or our wealth or our health. Rather, it causes us to be infinitely bold for the glory of God’s name – for which we will give up everything – health, wealth, and our best earthly dreams of our best life.

So we again return to our question – how did David’s faith grow to be exhibited in such bountiful confidence? If I am thinking about seeing young people grow up into those whose confidence in their God would be invincible, what must I know? The next segment of this Psalm, verses 4-6, holds at least part of the answer. Let’s read them together [\[READ vv. 4-6\]](#).

That is Grounded in an Experience of the Holy (vv. 4-6)

In this segment of the Psalm, David begins to reveal to us what is in his heart of hearts. Given what might sound like his flamboyant boasts in the first three verses we may be surprised at what follows. An athlete that came to mind while I was preparing this sermon and reflecting on David’s comments about his enemies is Dennis Rodman. Rodman is a warrior on the court – knowing no fear and causing many contenders to stumble and fall. But what about his comments off the court? What was behind the on court confidence and charisma? Here are a few off court quotes from Rodman:

They say Elvis is dead. I say, no, you’re looking at him. Elvis isn’t dead; he just changed color.

As long as I play ball, I can get any woman I want.

I go out there and get my eyes gouged, my nose busted, my body slammed. I love the pain of the game.

Hmm, Rodman’s quotes seem to reflect a love, a passionate love, for himself. What about David’s off-court quotes, the David who had killed his tens of thousands. Though David has been driven from his home, from his family, his livelihood, from all that he knows as life, he asks of the Lord just *one* thing. Just one. Consider ourselves in this situation? How clear-minded would we be? It’s almost as if a genie has appeared on the scene and given David one wish in his hour of peril...we all pause breathlessly...what will he say? If this were a reality show, we’d go to a commercial break, but praise God it is not. David gives his answer straight away. The one thing he desires can be summed up in three actions, one person, and one place.

David has requested that he may dwell with, gaze upon, and inquire of. What does this mean? Hear the same thing said in a different way by another Psalmist, let me read to you Psalm 84 [\[Read Psalm 84:1-4, 10-12\]](#). What a beautiful expression of longing by the Psalm-

⁶ Calvin, J. *Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1*.

ist. Do you remember the early days of your first love, do you remember how everything in you simply wanted to be with that other person no matter what – you’d give up anything if only... While the Psalmist love is much deeper and longer lasting than this, it is in some ways similar in its expression. It is all-consuming; David knows that it is the Lord that he deeply desires to be near. And he forgets everything else because of it.

What we mustn’t look over, however, is made very clear in both Psalm 27 and 84. These desires to dwell with, gaze upon, and inquire of are focused on the Lord God himself, but they also have a locality, that is, they are contextualized, there is an actual place David is thinking of. He is not longing simply to meet with God on the beach while witnessing powerful waves, nor at the foot of a majestic mountain towering overhead, he wants to be with God in his house, at his temple, and herein lies an important connection for us, as new covenant believers.

The “temple” or “house of God” or “his dwelling places” are mentioned many times throughout the Psalms, almost always in reference to drawing near to God. In the Old Testament Jewish mind, this was not just metaphorical language, it was reference to a literal location – either the tabernacle or after Solomon, the temple. This was *where* God was and *where* one would go to meet with him, learn of him, offer sacrifices to him and to gather with his people. And this is *where* David longed to be. So how should we read this?

I think the New Testament scriptures make the answer abundantly clear. 1 Corinthians 3:16 says that [we are] ***“God’s temple and that God’s spirit dwells in”*** [us], and in Ephesians 2:21 Paul, speaking to the New Testament church in Ephesus says that they are, ***“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*** You see, what was mud, brick, and gold in the Old Testament, the physical temple where God dwelt, has been replaced by His people in the New Covenant. Through his Spirit, God now literally dwells among his people. We are a temple whose cornerstone is Christ. Just as David gathered with the people of God in a physical building to draw near to God, we in the New Covenant gather together as the people of God, to draw near to God, on the merit of our cornerstone Christ. For David to pine for the temple and all that it offered is paralleled by modern day Christians longing to be near God among his people. Or to say it more conventionally, to be at church.

Q: What was in the heart of hearts of the warrior king who so confidently and boldly speaks of God’s salvation and his enemies’ downfall? It was drawing near to God, among his people, that he might know (dwell with), worship (gaze upon), and ask of (inquire of) the Lord God Almighty. Verses 5 and 6 are connected to verses 3 and 4 by the word “For.” What did David know would be true of the person who set his heart upon God in the midst of the people of God? That there he would find protection, peace, salvation, and victory. And all of this would culminate in a man who would shout joyfully, sing and make melody, who would worship.

We must be sure we don’t miss the picture here for it is sweeter than honey, more precious than gold, this is better than air!... David boasts confidently in his great and mighty God

without shame or reserve, the heart beating inside the chest of this boasting man yearns for one thing, to draw near to God among God's people, FOR, in drawing near his boasts will be proved righteous and true and he will praise God all the more. A heart in love with God and his people *will* boast.

Dear parent, have you ever heard your child boasting in the Lord? Have you ever seen their chests puff up with pride as they consider or give witness to their God? Have you ever heard them sing in church and think to yourself, boy, they really sound like they mean it! Have you heard them pray in earnest? Have you seen tears of godly sorrow that produce the fruits of repentance? Can your child use the words "beautiful" and "Lord" in the same sentence in genuine awe of God? If the answer is no, perhaps it is because far too little is made of church in your home. And we are not simply talking about being *at* church or *in* church (though that is a good start) - but rather, dwelling, gazing, inquiring – that is, knowing, worshiping, and asking of the Lord while among God's people. Where will your child learn to boast of the Lord? He or she will learn to boast of the Lord among the church, as they see God's faithfulness worked out in the midst of his people (personal testimony as an elder).

That is Sustaining in Difficulty (vv. 7-10)

We can see how this confidence and heart disposition works itself out in the midst of David's life in verses 7-10. He says [[Read verses 7-10](#)]. As in so many of the Psalms, we see here the complexity and difficulty we often experience in our own hearts and minds when suffering comes. David wrestles with the reality of his life unraveling versus the reality of his confidence deeply rooted in the Lord.

To a great degree, I think we see David, in these verses engaged in battle with his own unbelief... Just as Abraham did, Moses did, Elijah did, Thomas did, and Paul did...Can you see it here. David makes statements of truth, but then reveals his own heart's thoughts and the two are not congruent. Be gracious to me! Answer me! Cast me not off! – You who have been my help, O God of my salvation. It is as if David *knows* these truths, but is working hard to *believe* these truths. His struggle is an open one, but it is fenced in by his faith, expressed as confidence – because the one who has been in the temple knows that he is sheltered in the day of trouble (v.5). When struggle comes for your youth, and it surely will, will he or she have grown to love drawing near to God in the midst of the church in a way that steels them against the discouragement and disillusionment that eventually results in abandonment, and rejection of the faith?

It is interesting that verse 10 is where it is – when you, parent, are out of the picture, when all the earthly trappings are taken away that might artificially hold one to the faith, will your youth look to the Lord for his help, his salvation, his shelter? If he or she has been captivated by love for God while in his New Covenant temple (the church), then let me assure you, your youth will carry on as one, though attacked and wounded, who has unshakable confidence in God. Matthew Henry has observed that a parent's goal is not to raise a child who is independent, but dependent – upon God, confident that even if his mother and father disappear from the picture, God himself will be their mother and father.

That is Learned Through Instruction (vv. 11-12)

Verses 11-12 give us insight into what David asks of God in the midst of the struggle we see in verses 7-10. [Read vv. 11-12]. David simply asks to be taught and to be led. The request almost seems ridiculous... It's like asking for a school desk and a flashlight while sitting in the middle of a hurricane. Why doesn't David ask that God would make him a fighting machine instead? Or why doesn't he ask for the power to tear his enemies limb for limb? Because, David knows that in order his "*head shall be lifted up above my [his] enemies all around [him] me...*" (v. 6) he must learn and be led along God's wise path. Where can this happen? It happens in the place where David most loves to be, the place he can dwell with, gaze upon, and inquire of God. It is no wonder that David longs for the house of the Lord, for it is there that he will find his salvation.

Beloved, our enemies are many. Your children's enemies are many. There is certainly the world, but there is also Satan, and then there is sin. How will we overcome? What will we do in the hurricane? We will sit down at our school desks and pick up our flashlights. We will resolve to be taught his ways. Q: But where can we be taught his ways? A: Where we can inquire of his ways. Q: Where can we inquire of his ways? A: We can inquire of his ways in his house. Q: And where is his house? A: His house rests upon Christ, and is built of his people. Dear ones, I cannot be more clear, *it is here*, among God's people and under the teaching of his word that you will learn the Lord's ways and be led on his paths.

Return to verse 5 where this is made so clear – intimacy with God is found in his house, under his word, with his people. When this is true of us, I can be sure that, "*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.*" Dear parent, God offers your child what you cannot offer them. There is no better desire you could have for them than that they would be taught his ways and be led by him on a level path.

And is Consummated (or Fulfilled) in Hope (vv.13-14)

Finally, we here the echoes of verses 1-3 in the closing verses of this Psalm. [Read vv. 13-14]. If our lips are able to profess belief, then surely, faith is our tongue. David, here, by faith says, "I believe..." There is no hint in this present Psalm of any earthly reason for David to expect that he will see the goodness of the Lord in his present circumstances. Nevertheless, David trusts in the promises of God as he counsels himself and all who would listen, to wait, to be strong, to take courage. Perhaps he had this promise in mind:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12)

These last two verses are the certain expressions of a heart which has been captivated by the beauty of the Lord in his temple and transformed by the hope of salvation. How unimaginably sweet it would be to hear, in the midst of trouble, our youth quoting these words to themselves that Paul spoke in the midst of imprisonment and opposition:

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain (Philippians 1:18-21)

Conclusion

As we conclude, I want to make just one comment along the lines of summary and application. Much more extensive application, however, will be made this evening by Pastor Russ.

What is your dream for your child? I believe that most of us would say that we want to see our children grow up to be godly children. But are we willing to see that dream eclipse all other dreams? Do we want children who have an invincible confidence in their God? The kind of almost savage joy that David professes in verses 1-3? Do we want children who say, "There is one and only one thing I seek after... that I may dwell in the house of God all the days of my life." Do we want this more than we want to see our children succeed in sports, be happy, be well-liked by their peers, perform well in their schooling, complete college, have living wages, annual vacations, and "good" homes when they grow up?

I want to humbly, yet firmly, suggest, that in some of your homes, your earthly desires for your children have eclipsed or are eclipsing your heavenly desires for them. I don't want to give specific examples, because it is too easy for us to say, "Oh, that is what he means, well that is not me." So here is a hypothetical assessment question: Let's say, on average, it will cost about \$50K to send your child to college for four years. Higher education is the gateway to so many things in life and you and your spouse have worked so hard and given up so much to make this possible for your child. He or she is now 14. Overnight, the world changes. You wake up and find out that there is now a "church attendance tax." Effectively, to take your child to church for the remaining years they are with you will cost about \$50,000. What would you do?

I can only think of one reason why a parent would not spend the \$50,000 on college but instead spend it on the church tax... but first hear a quote by Spurgeon on this Psalm:

More and more is the conviction forced upon my heart that every man must traverse the territory of the Psalms himself if he would know what a goodly land they are. They flow with milk and honey, but not to strangers; they are only fertile to lovers of their hills and vales.⁷

The only reason that a parent would spend the \$50K on the "church tax" and not college is that they themselves had come, like David, to be able to speak every word in Psalm 27 from the very truest depth of their heart. They know that there is nothing better than gazing on the beauty of the Lord and they are willing to risk their child's future on it. Let's Pray. [Pray]

⁷ Spurgeon, C. *Treasury of David*.