

The Encouragement Project Week 5: Know Your True Address (Psalm 27:1-14) **David Bawks - Pathway Community Church (May 30, 2021)**

Good morning Pathway! Welcome to our service this morning. This morning we finish The Encouragement Project. We've been going through various scriptures to find hope and encouragement. Last week we went through Psalm 37 and looked at the centrality of joy and delight in our Christian life.

Psalm 27 Of David.

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?

² When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall. ³ Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.

⁴ One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

⁵ For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.

⁶ Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

⁷ Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me. ⁸ My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.

⁹ Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior.

¹⁰ Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.

¹¹ Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.

¹² Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations.

¹³ I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

This is a great psalm for us to explore this morning as we finish our Encouragement Project series. There is so much here for us to reflect on and draw encouragement from. Today I'm focusing more on the first part, and there's two aspects I'd like to bring to your attention.

1) Know your refuge.

David begins with affirming three aspects of his relationship with God: the Lord is my **light**, my **salvation** and my **stronghold**. Let's go through those in turn. In David's time, when

they need a **light** they would use a pottery lamp with a candle or oil and flame. If you were walking through a dark place, it wouldn't shine very far in front of you, but it would show you the next few steps. In Psalm 119, he writes, "Your word is a light to my feet." He's saying that scripture is like that lamp, that shows just enough for you to see the next few steps, but not all the way down the road. We need the Lord to be our light as we navigate uncertainty. Sometimes we want to have the whole picture before we can move ahead, especially in times of uncertainty. Our encouragement from this is that even when we can see all the way down the road, God always provides enough guidance for us to take the next step forward. One of the ways we've looked at regarding finding and following God's will in difficult times is to obey what we know now; take the step that has been revealed now, and then the next until a clear path emerges as we move forward.

The second thing that David affirms is that the Lord is his **salvation**. I would be curious to hear how David understood salvation, and what words he would use to say what salvation meant for him. It wouldn't be the same born-again language that we use from the ministry of Jesus, and probably carries much more military dimensions than how we imagine it. David lived in almost constant danger and threat, and salvation for him means that his life was delivered in battle, as well as having his sins forgiven and the assurance of eternal life.

He then uses a third image, also a military image – the Lord is the **stronghold** of my life. The stronghold is the place that withstands onslaught and attack. It is the fortress that is impenetrable. It was a place of retreat in battle where an army would be safe from an enemy's attack. Over the last year as we've retreated into our houses, they have become our strongholds in many ways. Remember last year when you couldn't go anywhere, except walk outside, and then the air was filled with smoke and you couldn't walk outside. So there was nowhere to go, nothing to do – just bunker down in your stronghold and shut the doors, shut the windows, and hope that the Amazon delivery guy doesn't get sick. Or if he or she does, that they have some kind of replacement lined up.

We all have strongholds, places or people we run to when things are thick. It could be family or friends. Some people retreat into their work or even into themselves until a storm blows over. And it is good to have people who can rally around us. Unfortunately, even a strong family or friendship is vulnerable. God is the only refuge that is impenetrable. Is the Lord your stronghold in the same way? When you face an emotional onslaught or a career setback, can you retreat to the Lord and find refuge with him? Are you able to process your challenges through prayer and regroup?

Verse 1 sets up a contrast: because the Lord is my light and salvation, whom should I fear? The Lord is my stronghold, of whom should I be afraid? By the way, I have a knock knock joke I heard this week. Let's try it.

When David asked of whom shall I be afraid, this was not merely a rhetorical question - he had a number of candidates for the position. Throughout his life, he had people out to kill him, including some of his own sons, which is so terrible. But given the reality of God as his light and salvation, he realized that he did not have to fear the threats facing him.

Living through covid I believe that many of us have internalized a mindset of fear. Even the most basic of activities can take on some ominous dimension that they never had previously, and this can continue to affect us consciously and subconsciously, even if we are not aware of it. But while we should by all means have an orientation of caution, of health and safety, we must resist and fight against living in fear. As Christians, our lives are much more than the physical aspects and we have the encouragement that like David, God is able to keep us safe physically in times of trouble and He is also able to keep us safe spiritually by protecting us from things that attack our minds and hearts.

I had a conversation a couple of weeks ago with someone who recently moved to California, and he told me that his fiancée is a nurse who has spent the last year moving into the worst of the covid hotspots. When New York was at its worst, she moved there to help, and then when things improved to the next epi-center and hotspot. Eventually that brought them to California. But I was really struck by that missional attitude that says when everyone else is running away, I'm going in to help. I will put myself in danger to help others. That's not something I have heard much of over the last year, but that is the attitude that has marked the church during the pandemics of the past. That is the boldness that we will need as a church to move into this next season of ministry, and to push forward as we reopen and get back to outreach and helping those in need.

Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident. David knew the source of his strength and courage. It was able to sustain him through danger. Can you say the same? What is your stronghold? Know your refuge. Here's another aspect of this psalm I'd like you to remember.

2) **Know your true address.**

We've been working on teaching Makena her full address, and Joaquin Murieta is a bit of a mouthful. Living in the US, you probably take having an address for granted, but in some other parts of the world you don't actually have an address. In Kenya, you don't have street addresses like here. In our last house, the house itself had no name or number, the road had no name, and even the road next to it had no name. So we could send a GPS pin to someone so they could find it, but we had to give directions to people to go down the paved road, turn at the coke kiosk, which was not completely helpful because there was a coke kiosk at every turn from the road, then turn into a narrow lane, and then come to the house with a black gate and purple walls. Not have a street address also means there's no mail delivery to your house, but you pick up your mail at a PO Box at the post office.

Of course, you know your address, and you could easily list it out if I asked because you have to write down on so many forms. But look with me at verse 4: “One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.”

David’s desire was to build a temple for God. Perhaps he saw that as one aspect of his legacy would outlive him, that would continue to define the worship of Israel for generations. But God refused to allow him to build this structure. When David was writing this, the Israelites had a tabernacle, the temporary and movable place of worship that God had directed them to build in the desert after they had left Egypt. But they did not have a permanent location of worship.

What does it mean to dwell in God’s house? We don’t know exactly when David wrote this, and it is possible that this was written during a time when he was living out in the wilderness, living in caves, and constantly on the move from Saul. At one point he had to leave Israel completely and live with the Philistines. Later when he became king he did have a pretty nice house, quite a decent place to live.

Over the last year we have lived out the reality that we are the church, and that the church is not a building. Wherever we are, we bring God’s power, presence and favor with us. If that is at home, if it is online, or wherever it is we worship together we bring the church there. If we meet in our house to pray with two or three friends, the church is there. If we visit someone, then we are bringing the church with us.

I have some friends who are church planters, and some were renting schools before the pandemic, and now they can’t get back into the school, so they have no address or physical location at all. I know one that is meeting in another church’s parking lot. They still have pastors, and ministries, and vision, and people, but no physical space, and even though that is destabilizing, it points to a certain reality that as a church we are on the move, just passing through, and that although we may take on a physical address for a time, that is never our ultimate destination or our true essence.

So what does David mean exactly by dwelling in the house of the Lord forever? He describes this as gazing on the beauty of the Lord. This is abiding in God’s presence, practicing the presence of God, soaking up the Lord’s wisdom and nature. In John 15, Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine and the branches to talk about how we must abide in him. He says that he is the vine, and we are the branches. We can only bear fruit by remaining in the vine. Jesus says this:

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

This is what it means to dwell in the house of the Lord. It means remaining in Christ, and His words remaining in us. Then when we ask for whatever we wish, it will be given to us. This is the same as what we saw last week in Psalm 37. Obeying the Father's commands and remaining in his love results in God's love being in us and our joy being complete.

David also described living in the house of the Lord as seeking him in his temple. This requires pursuit, intentionality, and effort. That is what our spiritual life requires.

No matter where we are, remember that our true address is in the house of the Lord. That doesn't take a physical shape or mean a physical location. It can help to have a sanctuary like this to assemble together for worship. But God's dwelling place is in us, and goes with us wherever we go.

I've come to really appreciate this closing song called Battle Belongs by Phil Wickham. Here are some of the lyrics:

So when I fight, I'll fight on my knees
With my hands lifted high
Oh God, the battle belongs to You
And every fear I lay at Your feet
I'll sing through the night
Oh God, the battle belongs to You

Almighty fortress, You go before us
Nothing can stand against the power of our God
You shine in the shadow, You win every battle
Nothing can stand against the power of our God

After the song then I will close in prayer.

Let me pray this commission over us.

Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.
Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.
Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations. I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.