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THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND MY SALVATION

Sermon for New Year's Eve, 2017

Psalm 27

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 27: <sup>1</sup> **The LORD is my Light and my Salvation. Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the Fortress of my life. Of whom should I be afraid?**

<sup>2</sup> **When evildoers came against me to devour my flesh, my oppressors and my enemies stumbled and fell.**

<sup>3</sup> **If an army were to pitch camp against me, my heart would not be afraid. If a war were to break out against me, in this I would be confident.**

<sup>4</sup> **One thing I have asked of the LORD. That I shall 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 reflect in His temple.**

<sup>5</sup> **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 set me high on a rock.**

<sup>6</sup> **Now my head will be high above my enemies all around me. Therefore I shall offer sacrifices in His tent with shouts of joy. I shall sing and make music to praise the LORD.**

<sup>7</sup> **Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud! Be gracious to me and answer me!**

<sup>8</sup> **When You said, "Seek My face!" my heart said to You, "Your face, O LORD, I shall seek."**

<sup>9</sup> **Do not hide Your face from me! Do not turn Your servant away in anger! You have been my Help. Do not cast me off or abandon me, O God of my salvation!**

<sup>10</sup> **When my father and my mother have abandoned me, the LORD will take me in.**

<sup>11</sup> **Teach me Your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies!**

<sup>12</sup> **Do not surrender me to the will of my oppressors! For false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.**

<sup>13</sup> **Surely, I am convinced that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.**

<sup>14</sup> **Wait eagerly for the LORD! Have courage! Let your heart prove to be strong! Wait eagerly for the LORD!**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

For some, Christmas is over for another year. The Christmas tree has come down, and the decorations have been put back into storage, where they will stay for another eleven months. Many will say that life now returns to some kind of normality.

Is there anything left of the brightness of Christmas? Probably not. All too often, Christmas, the great season of light, comes and goes with no more lasting effect than the used tinsel you will find all scrunched up and thrown away in the garbage. Such gloomy thoughts may give us pause as we stand at the brink of a new year. Will the new year bring with it more light, or will the darkness prevail?

King David faced similar ambiguities of life. We don't know the precise circumstances under which he wrote this psalm, but it's clear that he's enduring some kind of crisis. As king of Israel, he would find himself uncertain about the future. Quite often the future seemed dark, not only because of the work of his enemies, but also because of his own sin. The pressures on him to lead the nation were probably beyond what most of us endure. Even the power and wealth of a king could not guarantee a bright future. In many of David's psalms, his confidence seems to waver, so he cries out to God begging for relief.

This psalm is a bit different. In this psalm, David boldly proclaims God as his Light. **"The LORD is my Light and my Salvation,"** he says. There's a recognition that he may not immediately see everything as clearly as he wishes. Twice, in the last verse, he steels himself to **wait eagerly for the LORD!** But the psalm is punctuated with confidence: **"If an army were to pitch camp against me, my heart would not be afraid."** **"I would be confident."** **"He will set me high on a rock."** **"I shall sing and make music to praise the LORD."** **"I shall see the goodness of the LORD."** **"The LORD is my Light and my Salvation. Whom shall I fear?"**

David's confidence, a confidence engendered by the Spirit of God, is *your* confidence. Yes, there are times in your life when you seem to waver. Perhaps you have spent days or nights in the darkness crying out to God for relief. Even today, you may cringe at the thought of a new year. That's one reason God has given us this powerful Word. Since it is the Word of God, it builds and strengthens faith. It's good to hear it and to speak it to one another. Listen to those words again, **The LORD is my Light and my Salvation. Whom shall I fear?**

The Light that God gives illuminates and banishes all fears. It's clear that David is speaking about something other than physical light. In the Bible light is often a symbol of joy and happiness. In English too we sometimes speak of a "light" mood. Here, in David's psalm, the LORD, the source of our joy, is called **Light**. The question here, "**Whom shall I fear?**" is rhetorical. David is saying that because he lives in the light of the LORD, there is nothing to fear. That's because God's light is very bright, spiritually bright. It illuminates every possible enemy, not just those that are physical. No army of enemies is strong enough to deprive David of the joy and safety he has in the LORD's presence.

Imagine coming to your home late at night, by yourself, to find that the power is out. There's no light. You're a little bit spooked. If you manage to rustle up a candle, you'll have some measure of comfort. But you can't travel too far or too fast. If you find a torch you may feel better, but you can still see in only one direction. If you were to have a lantern you may feel better yet, but there would still be dark corners in your home. The point is that the more powerful the light, the less fear inhabits your life.

That's why David begins this psalm with the words "**The LORD is my Light.**" The LORD's light is so powerful that it is our salvation. It drives out darkness and illuminates our fears. This new year may have darkness, but whatever the darkness, it will be outshone by the Light of the LORD.

David is not an idealist. He doesn't suggest that the darkness will be eliminated from the world or even from our lives. He gives real life examples of how the darkness touches him. Darkness is a reality when living in a sinful world. Darkness is the power of sin to blind our eyes to the glory of God in Christ Jesus. Let's not dwell in the darkness, but let's examine it for a moment to prepare ourselves for its inevitable attack.

In verse 2, David assumes this attack: "**evildoers came against me to devour my flesh,**" he says. There are evil people in the world, people who are used by the darkness to put out the light in other people's lives. Maybe you've wondered about this but were ashamed to be so bold as to call someone evil. They don't always look evil. I'm not talking about people who don't act or think the way you act or think. Evil people are those around us who mock the faith, who pressure you not to believe in Jesus, who work against the Church. They will stumble and fall, to be sure. But it's not healthy for believers to pretend they don't exist, lest we forget the power of the light to save us.

In verse 3, David acknowledges the spiritual warfare that's taking place when he speaks of an **army** pitching a **camp against** him. The hosts of Satan encamp against

us. Satan is the master of spiritual darkness. It's where he best wages his war against our souls. He seeks to drag us into darkness and bind us in a place where we won't see the light of our God. We can't predict the sly forms of darkness that Satan will use this year, but like David we can be confident in the Light of the LORD: **"If an army were to pitch camp against me, my heart would not be afraid."**

Perhaps, for its subtleness, the most dangerous form of darkness is that which comes from inside us. The darkness of our own sin blinds us. It's difficult to imagine, and harder to confess, that we are our own worst enemies. We have many ways of blinding ourselves to the light of the LORD. The most effective of these is not to listen. Though we usually don't think about light coming in through our ears, in God's economy that is precisely what happens. That's what's happening as we speak. God is using the power of His Word to open our eyes to His light.

When we refuse to listen, when we avoid public worship, ignore Bible study opportunities, or don't have time for personal devotions, we're driving ourselves into the darkness and away from the salvation that's found in the Light. This is called sin. Our examination of the reality of darkness in the new year has uncovered its residence, our hearts. It's true, there is darkness in us. We cannot escape it, and we cannot save ourselves.

So, how can David be so certain that he **shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living**? How can he be so confident that the Light of the LORD is his salvation? If we have to seek out His Word and listen in order that we may see, what confidence is left? Perhaps we think, "I'm not good at listening. I don't spend very much time seeking His Word. King David might be able to do this, but not me!"

Dear friends, be quieted by this powerful Word, lest your objections become so loud you cannot see. The Light is more powerful than the darkness of your sin. That was demonstrated when God sent the Light into the world. I speak here not about the physical light that was created by the first words God spoke. I speak of the spiritual light God sent into the world to re-create everything. ***I speak of Jesus, the Light of the world***. The apostle John recorded the bold announcement of Jesus that He is the Light of which King David spoke. *"I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me will certainly not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life,"* (8:12). His light shines on life and gives life. He penetrates the soul, and His light and life are one and the same in us. We walk in His light instead of the darkness inherent in this sin-corrupted world.

The coming of Jesus at Christmas is a celebration of the power of light over darkness. That's why Christmas is celebrated with lights. Candles, tree lights, tinsel,

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house lights - are all symbols of a much more powerful light, the light of Jesus. Your salvation is not dependent on something you do. It was accomplished when the Light of the world drove out the darkness of sin by sheer wattage. Even through that dark day of His cross and death, He finally outshone the darkness. Your confidence lies in the light from that cross. In this light, Jesus' death, your sin, yes, the sin of not listening, as well as every other sin, is forgiven. In this light, all evil people, even the host of Satan, stumble and fall. **This Light is your salvation**.

I can understand why you might not want to leave your Christmas tree lit all year long. On the other hand, wouldn't that be a great way of recognising the light of your salvation? Jesus is your Light and your Salvation. This is true not just until the Christmas tree is sent out to pasture. It's true ***all the time***. Jesus is the Light of the new year. He will be with us to guide and protect against all darkness. Whom shall we fear?

In fact, His light never goes out. Every other light source in creation has a time limit. Scientists even predict the date when the sun will burn itself out. But the light of the Lord is eternal. We look forward to the end of darkness. It will come. God has promised that the eternal city of heaven "*has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb,*" (Rev 21:23). Jesus is the Light by which you see and live into eternity.

There is little doubt that many cast-off Christmas trees, many gloomy symbols of darkness, will cross our paths in the coming year. But because the Lord is our Light, we can be confident that we have salvation in His name. The darkness cannot overcome His light. <sup>5</sup> **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 set me high on a rock....** <sup>14</sup> **Wait eagerly for the LORD! Have courage! Let your heart prove to be strong! Wait eagerly for the LORD! Amen.**

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR NEW YEAR'S EVE

O heavenly Father, You are God from everlasting to everlasting. We thank You for the many blessings that You have bestowed on us during the year that is now drawing to a close. Our nation has been unworthy of Your favours, and have in many ways repaid Your goodness with ingratitude, by abusing Your gifts, and by transgressing Your holy commandments. You might justly have withdrawn Your mercy from us.

But You are a gracious God, full of compassion, patient, and merciful. You spare us when we deserve punishment, and in the midst of judgment You remember mercy. For Your Son's sake, You have cast all our sins behind You, and healed all our diseases. You have continued to be faithful to the blessings You gave us in baptism, have continued to let us hear Your Word and receive Your blessings in the Lord's Supper. You have delivered us from many perils, and have upheld us in our troubles. You have established peace within the borders of our country. You have provided us with food and clothing, and have blessed most of us with good health. You have given us all that we have.

Let Your grace rest on us that, young or old, we may grow strong in the Spirit, be filled with wisdom, and increase in the things that please You. Shine in mercy on all who feel the need of Your mighty aid. Brighten lives filled with darkness, and bring joy into homes filled with sorrow or suffering. Give the light of Your truth to those who rule in our land and elsewhere. Fill with Your wisdom all who are in positions of influence in our society so that godlessness, superstition, and ignorance may be removed from us.

Establish the reign of the Prince of peace over the nations of the earth. Bring all to the obedience of the holy Child. Grant that the light of His life, teaching, ministry, passion, death, and resurrection may shine on every land.

We pray for the sick, the wounded, the hurt, the troubled, and the fallen, especially in our congregations. Grant them whatever they need: health of body, strength of faith, firmness of hope, and, above all, the assurance of salvation.

O God, the passing years remind us of our frailty. We are dust and ashes, and, like the grass of the field, we are here today and do not endure on this earth. Our years pass away like a shadow. Amid the many changes and troubles of this transitory world You alone abide for ever. You are our dwelling-place in all generations. You are our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble. Therefore we do not fear, even if the earth quakes and the mountains topple into the sea. Therefore we praise You with all our hearts today. Accept our praise, O God, and show us Your salvation for evermore, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

## NEW YEAR'S EVE

Isaiah 30: 8-17

<sup>8</sup> Come now! Write it on a tablet in their presence and inscribe it on a scroll, so that it may be there in the future as a permanent witness! <sup>9</sup> For they are a rebellious people, deceitful children, children who have refused to listen to the instruction of the LORD.

<sup>10</sup> They have been telling the seers, "You shall not see!" and those who have visions, "You shall not see visions for us! Speak smooth words to us! Have prophetic visions that are illusions!" <sup>11</sup> Leave the road! Turn aside from the path! Stop speaking in our presence about the Holy One of Israel!" <sup>12</sup> Therefore this is what the Holy One of Israel has said: "Because you have rejected this Word, have trusted in oppression and crookedness and have relied on them, <sup>13</sup> therefore this sin will become for you like a gap in a high wall, which is about to collapse and bulges out. It will crash quite suddenly. <sup>14</sup> It will break as a potter's jar does when it is crushed so ruthlessly that no potsherd can be found in its fragments to use in carrying fire away from a hearth, or in skimming water out of a cistern."

<sup>15</sup> For this is what the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said: "You will be saved by turning back and being patient. You will be strong by keeping silent and by trusting." However, you have refused. <sup>16</sup> You

have been saying, "No! Rather, we shall flee on horses." Therefore you will flee. You have been saying, "We shall ride on fast horses." Therefore those who pursue you will prove to be fast. <sup>17</sup> One thousand will flee when one person threatens them. You will flee when five persons threaten you, until you are left like a flagstaff on the top of a mountain, like a flag on a hill.

Romans 8:31b-39

If God is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> How will He not, who did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for us all, along with Him, also freely give us all things? <sup>33</sup> Who will accuse those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who will condemn? Christ Jesus, who died, and, more than that, has been raised, is the One who is even at the right hand of God, who is also interceding for us.

<sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As Scripture has said: "For Your sake we are being killed all day long. We have been considered as sheep to be slaughtered." <sup>37</sup> Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who has loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor present circumstances nor future circumstances, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor any other

created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Luke 12:35-40

<sup>35</sup> “Be dressed for action and have your lamps burning! <sup>36</sup> Be like people who are waiting for their master when he comes back from the wedding feast, so that when he comes and knocks they may immediately open the door for him! <sup>37</sup> Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find wide-awake when he comes! Truly, I tell you, he will dress himself for work, have them recline at the table, and will come and wait on them. <sup>38</sup> If he comes even in the second watch, or even in the third watch, and finds them like that, blessed are they! <sup>39</sup> Be aware of this, that if the owner of a house had known at what hour the burglar was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into! <sup>40</sup> You also, be ready! For the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him.”