

Thought for the Week Sunday 22nd March 2020

Today we find ourselves in a very strange and difficult situation, with which we are all trying to come to terms. We cannot meet together to worship God as is or normal weekly pattern and all our various weekly activities and special events have had to be cancelled or postponed.

However, we need to remember that God is sovereign and that he is in control. In the first of what will be a series of "Thoughts for the Week" which I will post online, I want to turn our thoughts to **Psalm 27**. Please begin by reading this psalm for yourself.

It is not clear what are the circumstances behind this psalm which King David penned. All we know that he was facing enemies, that he was in physical danger and in these circumstances, he was tempted to be afraid.

In March 1933 when the United States of America was in the terrifying clutches of the Great Depression, President, Franklin D Roosevelt, in his inaugural address, said: "*The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.*" Fear is a real problem in every age and, as we find ourselves isolated from social contact and with economic uncertainty looming, never mind the possibility that we may contract this virus, we too may be tempted to fear.

But Psalm 27 opens with one of the most sublime affirmations of the security of God's people to be found in scripture. It tells us that "*the Lord is our light*" to guide us, "*our salvation*" to deliver us and "*the stronghold of our lives*" in whom we can take refuge. And, if this is the case, then "*of whom (or of what) shall we be afraid?*" In the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul gives a similar assurance to all those who have put their faith and trust in Christ, when he says: "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us ... and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

The psalmist in verse 4 of Psalm 27 says that his desire is to be in the Lord's house and to seek him. We may not be able to come to the Meeting House over the next while, but we can still seek the Lord's presence and worship him wherever we are. The Duke of Wellington is supposed to have said that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. In David's case, his battles were won in his private times of worship with the Lord - they were what prepared him to face all kinds of trials and hardships. We too have the privilege to come near to God in worship - to praise and thank him as well as to pray for the things which concern us. It is those times which will prepare us for whatever lies ahead. Let us all make sure that we take time to seek the Lord during this difficult period.

The psalmist's advice in verse 14 is also important when he says, "Wait for the Lord." It's easier for me to write about waiting than it is to practise it! Probably like most of you, I'm an activist and I don't like to be kept waiting! I suspect the Lord knows this and so he arranges for me to be in the slowest queue in the supermarket or the slowest lane on the motorway! But just as the pauses and silences in music make it more beautiful, there are times when God calls on us all to wait, to wait for him to act according to his will and purpose. The ability to calm our souls and wait for the Lord is one of the most difficult things in the Christian life for our old nature is restless and the world around us is in a frantic hurry. But that's exactly what we need to do at this time.

God can help us conquer our fear if we will learn to worship him, walk with him through whatever life may bring and above all, wait upon him.

As David said in Psalm 62: "Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall never be shaken."

Here is a prayer which you might like to pray:

Father God

Worry and fear are not of Your heart, O Lord. Your Word reminds us that perfect love casts out all fear, and we pray Your perfect love upon the hearts of all those who are burdened with fear of this virus. Lord, we know with no doubt that You are bigger than the threat of anything, especially illnesses. Please comfort those who are living in fear, free them from the bondage that anxiety creates within. Remind them and us that You are still on the Throne and that You are still in control. Lord give us all the serenity that comes only from the Prince of Peace. Help those who are living in unease to trust You in this time so that in times to come we may rest assured that You will be faithful to be with us until the end of age. We rest at the Throne of the Almighty such fears and cast them upon You, for Your burden is Light and Your Yoke is easy and we know You cover us with Your wings. In Jesus' name, Amen

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