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Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: Summer in the Psalms
Message: This One Thing

Transcribed Message
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Psalm 27

What are you afraid of? There are all kinds of phobias that people deal with on a daily basis. There are literally pages of them. Acrophobia -- the fear of heights. Aerophobia -- the fear of flying. Aquaphobia -- the fear of water. Astraphobia -- the fear of storms. Claustrophobia -- the fear of closed spaces. Dentophobia -- the fear of the dentist. Hemophobia -- the fear of blood. Iatrophobia -- the fear of doctors. Zoophobia -- the fear of animals. The list goes on and on. There are literally hundreds of them. All of us in our honesty would have to say there's something that we are fearful of. I asked Bonnie, what's your greatest fear? She said, losing you. She asked me, what's your greatest fear? I said, losing you. We had a little group hug. There wasn't really a group. It was just the two of us. Whatever it is -- spouse losing a spouse, parent losing a child, child losing a parent --all kinds of things that can at times grip our hearts and our minds with a sense of fear. Our health. Waiting for a report or maybe we've received a report from the doctor. Something in our work that we're not certain of what the future's going to look like. Certainly, financial fears that people face and deal with. Some people are afraid to get married. Some people are afraid they won't get married. Remember in that statement, FDR said you have nothing to fear but fear itself. I don't even know what that means. You have nothing to fear but fear itself. But I do know what the psalmist means in Psalm 27 and verse 1 when he says "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold, the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid"

This morning Psalm 27 is where we are in our Summer in the Psalms series. If you've noticed, we basically are staying in book 1 which is Psalm 1 to 41. Next summer, Lord willing, we'll break from Romans and we'll do book two. The summer of '25 we'll break from Romans and do book 3. The summer after that in '26 I have no idea what will be happening but this is what we've done for these summer Sundays. This morning we look at this 27th Psalm in which we will see when we make Jesus the one thing, the

main thing, the all-important thing, then everything doesn't go away. It just finds its proper place.

A quick review and overview. What we know. What do we know about the Psalms? We've learned many things but one thing we learned is there are different kinds of psalms. There are praise psalms. There are psalms of petition, psalms of thanksgiving. There are psalms that are messianic. There are psalms of lament. There are imprecatory psalms. We have all of these different kinds of psalms. We also have seen Psalm 1 and 2 fall into that first category of the wisdom psalms. Psalm 8 was a praise psalm. Psalm 19, that we looked at last Sunday, was a combination of both praise and wisdom. What we'll see this morning when we come to Psalm 27 is this.

First of all, we'll see that this is another psalm of David. We don't know the specific circumstance, the context in which this psalm was written by David. It looks very similar to a time in his life when he was running for his life from Saul, when he was out of the country, out of the boundaries it seems of Israel, and he longed to go back. That almost looks like it fits what he was describing in that context.

But this is another psalm that divides itself nicely into two parts. We've seen that this last Sunday. Here we have verses 1 through 6 and in these two parts the contrast is so strong between them that liberal scholars often look at these kinds of things in the word. Liberal scholars say these psalms weren't even written by the same person. The first part of the psalm was written by one person and the second part was written by another person. They're just so disjointed. I don't think that's the case at all. I think it's more likely that what you have here is almost a reflection of Mark 9. Remember when the father is wanting Jesus to heal his son. He says to Jesus: Lord, I believe. Help me in my unbelief. It seems to me you have something very similar here in this psalm where you have two strongly contrastive words from the mouth and pen of David. They're not just stitched together happenstance, having been written by two different people. No, they're coming out of the heart of the same man. He is just giving us this perspective of I believe, I trust, but help me in those moments of doubt and weakness.

Thirdly, it's another combination psalm. It is another combination psalm because of that contrast. The first six verses seemed very much like a psalm of petition in which he is crying out to God and declaring his trust and his confidence in God. Then in the

second part, verses 7-14, it really shifts to more of a lament. He is calling out to God almost in the sense of uncertainty. We all know that fear doesn't just go away and stay away. Even in those moments when we feel like we are overcoming, fear doesn't go away and never come back. We bar the door and it comes in a window. It has a way of making itself known and present in our heart and our mind. Here is the honesty it seems to me of Psalm 27. It's an honesty that I live in and I think it's an honesty that you probably live in as well. Let's ask the question again. What are you afraid of?

Let's look at the first three verses and see that in these opening verses David gives us realities and he gives us affirmations to look at. Psalm 27 verses 1 through 3 written by David: "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? When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me my heart shall not fear. Though war arise against me, yet I will be confident." Notice first the realities. There are three of them.

First, fear is a powerful emotion. Fear is a powerful emotion. It is not just a powerful emotion. It's a powerful physiological response to something. We can all think of a time, maybe not that long ago, in which fear gripped our heart in such a way that our heart beat rose significantly. Maybe we were even trembling in some respect depending on what it was that we had encountered and the fear that gripped us for that moment. It is so powerful. It is a strong emotion that we all understand is part of what we deal with often on a daily basis.

It reminds me of a Peanuts cartoon in which Linus comes to Lucy in her counseling booth. He says to her: I'm in sad shape. My life is full of fear and anxiety. The only thing that keeps me going is this blanket. I need help. And she says to him: They always tell us that the first thing we need to do is to acknowledge that we have a problem. She's encouraging him that he has taken the rightful first step. Then she goes through and asks him what is he afraid of. What has gripped his heart and is such a problem in his life? she starts enumerating as I did at the beginning all of these different phobias that he might be encountering and he says no to every one of them. Finally, she says what about pantophobia. He asks what's that? She says the fear of

everything. Linus goes: that's it! I'm afraid of everything! We know that fear is a powerful emotion.

Secondly, we know that there are at times reasons to fear. There are reasons to fear. Certainly from the human viewpoint that is true. David recounts them. In these verses that we just read, verses 2 and 3 especially, David begins by saying who shall I fear in verse 1. We might say what shall I fear? It is both. He asked the question twice. So it certainly is a reality that it is there. But he goes on in verses 2 and 3 and he gives us some of the suggestions that he is encountering. Evildoers assail me. Adversaries and foes are all around me. There is an army that wants to make war with me. You can even think of David going up against Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 and verse 44. Goliath, this monster of a man looks across the brook at this scrawny little guy and said, I'm going to feed your flesh to the birds and to the beasts. That would strike fear into the heart of most. David didn't have an easy life. he was after all a warrior. He was the king that God was using to bring Israel's greatest zenith. He knew troubles. Even as a king he knew troubles. A lot of them in fact he brought on himself. Here he is and he's reminding us that there is a reality from the human viewpoint for fear.

No matter how great or how threatening we are reminded thirdly that God didn't give us a spirit of fear. God didn't give us a spirit of fear. If you look at Isaiah 56 David says this: "Be gracious to me, O God, for man is trampling on me all day long. An attacker oppresses me. My enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly. When I am afraid, I put my trust in you, in God whose word I pray. In God I trust. I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?" Paul writing to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 7 God has not given us a spirit of fear. He has given us a spirit of power, a spirit of love and of self-control. Very specifically God has not given us a spirit of fear. He doesn't want us to walk in a spirit of fear. It doesn't mean there are no reasons to be afraid, but that's not where God wants us to be. He doesn't want to remain there.

Look at the affirmations that flow from David's heart in this next section. Three affirmations. It begins at verse 1 with this declaration, this affirmation that the Lord is my light. Look at your text and you see that the word Lord is all in caps and reminds you again that that's the word for Jehovah. It is the word for Yahweh. It's the transcendent

God, but it is the God of revelation. It is the God beyond our capacity to know but a God who has made himself known to us. That is the first affirmation, the first declaration that he makes. The Lord is my light. You don't need to raise your hands. But if I were to ask you how many of you are afraid of the dark I really think the answer to that is all of us on some level. If you ask me if I'm home alone and there's a bump and a noise that's not supposed to be happening in my home at that time and you said you have the choice of hearing that in the middle of the day in broad daylight or you have the opportunity to hear that in the dead of night, which one do you pick? I know which one I'd pick. I want to have as much light shining in every room of the house as there can possibly be. When he says the Lord is my light, we ask the question who's afraid of the light?

It reminds me of that Chris Tomlin song, "How Great is our God". When he says he wraps himself in light and darkness tries to hide. Isn't that a great line? He wraps himself in light and darkness tries to hide. I've got a friend who knows I love flashlights and he gave me recently a flashlight. I know all of you men love flashlights too. Maybe some of you ladies as well. But he gave me like an 18 or 20,000 lumen flashlight. You have to carry it around like a bazooka. You can go out in the middle of the night and it's just like daytime out there. It's amazing. When he says the Lord is my light, it drives darkness away. The darkness cannot stand against the light. Dr. Boice says about this verse this is the only time in the Old Testament that the very name of God is attached to light. This is the one occurrence. The Lord is my light, David said. That's not the only time he will make a reference like that. In the 36th psalm. Listen to what he says there. Verse 9. "For with you is the fountain of life. In your light we see light." Then I like Psalm 104 verse 1: "Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great. You are clothed with splendor and majesty, covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent." Isn't that great? He clothes himself in light. Just as Tomlin said, darkness just has to run and hide in the presence of this affirmation that David makes. You get to the New Testament and Jesus says in John 8, I am the light. There that declaration is clearly the fact that Jesus is our light.

The second thing he says is the Lord is my salvation. If you've been at Covenant for a month, you know the answer to this question. When you see the word salvation in your Bible, what word do you immediately think of? Deliverance. Deliverance should be

in your mind every time you see the word salvation. Correlate that to the word deliverance and the context will tell you what kind of salvation is in view, what kind of deliverance is in view. Just turn over a page to Psalm 28 verse 8: “The Lord is the strength of his people. He is the saving refuge of his anointed.” He is the deliverer of his anointed. He is the salvation. He is the deliverer. He is their deliverance.

In this immediate context of Psalm 27, in what sense is the Lord David's salvation? In what sense is he looking to the Lord and affirming that the Lord is his deliverer? Clearly in light of verses 2 and 3, it's his physical enemies. It's the very ones that he has named. That's what he is looking to. He is looking to the Lord to deliver him from his physical real enemies. But it is more than that. It is a foreshadowing. It's a foreshadowing of that – John 8, Jesus is the light of the world. It's a foreshadowing of the fact that deliverance has come to us upon putting our faith and trust in Christ. We would be delivered from sin. We would be delivered from Satan. We would ultimately be delivered from hell itself. There is that salvation. There is that deliverance.

Then he says the Lord is my stronghold. The Lord is my stronghold. We said this a couple weeks ago. Proverbs 18:10 – “The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run to it and are safe.” I just love the picture in my mind. This mighty strong tower and the righteous running to this tower for the safety that they find in the name of Jehovah, in the name of the Lord their God. There is no promise here that there will not be attacks. There is no promise here that there isn't anything that you will never fear. There's a promise here that you will have a safe spot. The Lord will be your stronghold. The Lord will be your strength.

We know a lot about the safe spot here in Oklahoma. Every spring, and other times as well, the weather people remind us if you are in such and such a location get to your safe spot right now. A whole bunch of you think that means to go outside and look up in the sky and see if there's a tornado coming down your block. That's not what he meant. But there is a safety element there. There is a safe spot that you go to, and that's what he says. It's the Lord who is our safe spot. You have these three great affirmations. The Lord is my light. He's going to guide me. The Lord is my salvation. He is going to deliver me. The Lord is my stronghold. In him I will take refuge.

Now in verses 4 through 6, we see two more things. We see desires and certainties. Let's look at these verses. "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." these are amazing verses. "To gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple, 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 lift me high upon a rock, and now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy. I will sing and make melody to the Lord." The very first thing you see is David has a consuming desire. He has a consuming desire. He says one thing I have asked of the Lord. One thing I have asked the Lord. Psalm 57. He speaks of the fact that my heart is fixed, Lord. My heart is fixed on you. Psalm 108 he says my heart is steadfast. My heart is steadfast on you, Lord. Here it is. There's one thing. There's one thing that he is focused on. It is consuming him. It is the desire of his heart. It is what he is giving himself to, his energy, his passion. This one thing.

Think of how often there is that kind of language in Scripture. When Jesus says in Matthew 6:33 in the Sermon on the Mount, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all this other stuff will take care of itself. Seek first this one thing. This is what you should be focused on. When Jesus had the encounter in Luke 10 with Martha and Mary. Mary is sitting at his feet and conversing and learning and taking in. Martha is running about doing all the chores. Remember Jesus says after Martha complains to him about her sister. She's not doing her part, Lord. look at me. I'm wearing myself out in service. Jesus says to Martha: Martha, Martha, there is one thing. There is one necessary thing. Look at your sister. She's doing it. Or when you go on to the response that Jesus gave with regard to what was the greatest commandment, Jesus said there was one. There is one great commandment. Love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. David is just reflecting what the Spirit of God through the pages of Scripture reminds us of with regard to the priorities of life and the things that are really important.

This does not just happen. Let's not be confused about that. This statement that David makes. One thing I have asked of the Lord. It doesn't just happen to you. you don't just happen to have that kind of priority system drop into your head. It doesn't

automatically live itself out in your life. he tells us how he is pursuing this. I have asked he said. This is what I have asked of you, Father. I'm praying this. Please give me a steadfastness to focus on you. Please fix my heart, my soul, my mind on you. this is the one thing, Father, I want more than anything else in all the world. That's what he is saying. It's a prayer that he is offering.

Then he speaks to the fact that he will be asking. I look at that and go he's asked it in the past. He is clearly asking it in the present and he is promising that he is going to keep asking it even into the future. How often are you and I asking God this very strategic request? God, out of all the things that occupy my life, out of all the stuff that's calling out for my attention, here's all I want. I want this one thing. I don't know about you but when you look at this cry that David offers up, this petition that he wants, that he's asking, that he's desiring, when you read it and just meditate and look at it, it just kind of is a jolt to the system. I look at my life and some things are not going the way I would want them to go in my life. Maybe I'm a wreck. Maybe there's so much stuff going the wrong way that I'm crying out to God. What am I asking God to do in that set of circumstances in my life? When my marriage is falling apart ... and I'm not sure how to parent ... when things at work don't seem to be going anywhere near the way I had hoped or thought ... when our finances are teetering on the brink ... my health concerns are consuming me. We can name hundreds of things. What are we asking God in that moment?

I'm probably saying something like God, help me! Fix this! Get me out of this! Fix my spouse. Fix my child. Fix my boss. Give me some money. I'm thinking all kinds of things to ask of the Lord. What does David do? His focus is upward. He's looking up. In the midst of this circumstance, David's focus is not introspective. He is not looking at his miserable situation at that moment of his life the bad news come to him. His focus is God-ward. He says, God, I want to dwell. We're under the old covenant. The Jewish people, Old Testament Jewish believers, they had the tabernacle at this point in David's experience. they would later have the temple. That was a special place. That was a place that they longed to go to. It was a highlight for God's people to gather and to come together and to meet with God in these places that God had promised to meet with them. In fact, there's a whole bunch of psalms that are called the Psalms of ascent. and

since Jerusalem is on a hill, everywhere you came from you are ascending. You were going up. They would literally sing as groups of people made their way to Jerusalem for special occasions and for opportunities in worship. They were singing as they went, so anticipating what was awaiting them.

Here we are. We live in the New Covenant. We don't have a tabernacle. We don't have a temple. Technically, this isn't even the Lord's house. You and I are the Lord's house. You and I are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We meet and we gather and we have God having come down in the person of the Spirit of God and in living and indwelling us and we gather in that way. But the principle to me is the same. The principle is the same. We should have a strong desire to gather together with God's people to lift our voices in praise, to pray together, to encourage each other, to be under the word together, to grapple with the principles of Scripture together. That should be what we desire as well.

You look at this context. What is it that is keeping David from experiencing this passion that he has in his heart? This prayer: God, I want more of you. I want to be in your presence. I want to gaze upon your beauty. I want to inquire with others for you. What was keeping him from that? An army and a whole bunch of bad people chasing him around trying to kill him. Then I think of where we are today. What is it that keeps God's people from coming together today? Things like I'm too tired. Go to bed before 2 o'clock. We're so busy. We have so much to do this weekend and we just can't. The weather. It is raining. Sports. Think of where we are as New Covenant believers 2023 United States of America in light of David's passionate plea to have the opportunity to again come back into his homeland and make his way to a tabernacle that didn't have any of the beauty that we're enjoying here. But he wanted to be together with the people of God and he wanted to worship with them. Joe Carter has written a blog this last week entitled "Why We Need to Hear Sermons in Person". He just goes through all kinds of reasons why as the people of God that it is God's intent that we be together. Derek Kidner says of this section: "Note the singleness of purpose. One thing. The best answer to distracting fears of the priorities within that purpose to behold and to inquire a preoccupation with God's person and with his will."

Now look at his certain deliverance in verses 5 and 6. These verses are filled with confident certainty. He will hide me. He will conceal me. He will lift me up. I will offer shouts of joy. I will sing when our occupation is on God. We get him, and we get more than we ever imagined. That's what David says in Psalm 16:11. In your presence is fullness of joy. At your right hand there are pleasures forevermore. Or Psalm 37:4 when he says delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. This is the first half of this Psalm. It is just certainties, declarations, affirmations. God, I trust you. God, I want more of you.

Then you come to verses 7 to 12 and it shifts. It shifts dramatically. It shifts into a lament. We don't need to see these verses as a contradiction. They are simply reflecting what we all live out. This is the way we live our life. We're worshipers, but we're also pilgrims. If you've read *Pilgrim's Progress* you know pilgrims don't always make progress. Sometimes they stumble and fall on the way. That's what I think he is showing us here.

Let's look thirdly at cries for help and a commitment is made. Prayers for deliverance in verses 7 through 12. I just want you to note four things here in verses 7 through 9. "Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud. Be gracious to me and answer me. You have said, seek my face. My heart says to you, your face, Lord, do I seek. Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger. O you who have been my help, cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation." Do you see the difference in those words and the words we just looked at? He is into a full-scale lament here now about his fear that God is not going to hear him.

First of all, we all want to be heard. David wants to be heard. He wants the assurance that he's going to be heard. Not only is he anxious about whether God is going to be hearing him, he's anxious even about whether God is going to be angry with him. He wants to be heard. Sometimes our kids just want to be heard. They just want somebody to listen to their voice and interact with them face-to-face. Put the phone down and interact. Let them know that you're listening, that you hear them.

He wants acceptance firsthand. "For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in." now we know this is poetry and this is hyperbole. It is very unlikely that David's physical parents abandoned him. We know it happens. We know

children are abandoned by their parents. We all experience rejection. In some forms we experience rejection, not maybe always daily, but often times daily. There's rejection of some kind or another. We all long for acceptance. That is what David's crying out for here. Acceptance.

In verse 11, guidance. Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. We all need guidance. We all need this prayer. We saw in Psalm 1: Blessed is the man, blessed is the woman who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, who doesn't stand in the way of sinners, who doesn't sit in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and in his law he meditates day and night and finds the guidance that he needs.

Verse 12. There is protection. "Give me not up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have arisen against me and they breathe out violence." He has already rehearsed those who are opposed to him and he needs the protection of God. Does David have confidence that God will provide? How does every lament in the Psalms end? It comes back to focusing on God. Look.

There is a commitment that is made to wait. Verses 13 and 14. David says, I'm going to be looking. I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Now you can look at that and say, absolutely! I am too. It is true. We are going to look on the goodness of the Lord in heaven. We're going to see the goodness, the glory, the greatness, the majesty. It is going to be revealed in heaven. But David, like us, doesn't want to wait just to see it in heaven. He wants to experience it now too. I want to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. I want to see the grace of God at work in people's lives now. I want to see the mercy of God poured out on people now. I want to see the healing mercies and grace of God in the lives of people now. I want to hear stories about people hearing the gospel and responding in belief and faith and trust and coming to Christ and the trajectory of their life changing forever now. That's what we want. That was David's prayer. God, I want to see that. I want to see life change now.

Then verse 14. Waiting. "Wait for the Lord. Be strong and let your heart take courage. Wait for the Lord." I don't know about you. I'm a good waiter. I'm a really good waiter. When I go to Walmart, I'll look for the longest line and just go stand in a long line

so I have to wait even though there's a shorter one right over there. When I'm going down I-40, I'll often pull into a lane that looks like it's slowing down or maybe stopping just so that I can wait while all of the other traffic rushes by. I've told you before that I have enjoyed for many years waiting for Bonnie on occasion as we are going to go somewhere. I have repented of that sin often. But it is true. We're not always that good at waiting. We're not very good at being patient.

Look at this. This is what David brings us to finally. Wait for the Lord. Be strong. Let your heart take courage. Wait for the Lord. We maybe don't like waiting, but here's the thing. The Bible is full of people waiting. Abraham waits 25 years for a son. Isaac waits 20 years for a son. Jacob waits 14 years to get his wife. Joseph waits 13 years in prison. Ezra waits 24 years for the completion of the Temple. Jesus waited 30 years before he went out into ministry. Moses waited 40 years of training and then 40 years of wandering in the wilderness without ever even seeing the promised land. It's just part of God's plan for our life that we learn how to wait on the Lord. That's what he says. Wait on the Lord. But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not be faint. We walk by faith not by sight.

So what do we take away? What are we afraid of? God does not offer us a formula. I'm glad he doesn't. he offers us himself and that's enough. That is more than enough. Let's be people of a singular passion to know God. If we have a singular passion to know God, we're going to love others and live out the gospel too. The reality is that this gospel reminds us that we don't have to live in fear. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Did you hear that? There's no condemnation. If you're in Christ Jesus this morning, you might say, you don't know what I've done in my life. I say, I don't need to know what you've done in your life. I've got the promise of God right before me. It doesn't matter what you've done in your life. God's promise to you is whatever you've done in your life, if you come to Jesus and you say to him I believe and trust that what you did on the cross was in payment for my sin, then the promise from God is there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Not those who are doing their best. Not those who are working their way to heaven. Not anything that you and I could add. It is by grace alone, by faith alone, in

Christ alone. On that basis, he says you have nothing to fear from this point on. The most terrifying thing I could ever imagine or think of is to stand before a righteous, holy God in my sin. There isn't anything more terrifying. The writer of Hebrews says it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. But there is no anger. There is no fear when we're in Christ Jesus because our sins have been forgiven.