

December 31 2010 Sermon

New Year's Eve

Isaiah 30:15-17

Psalms 90:1-12

Romans 8:31b-39

Luke 12:35-40

Psalm 27 The Lord is my Light

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 evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.

3 Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident.

4 One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.

5 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.

6 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.

7 Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!

8 You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek."

9 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!

10 For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in.

11 Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

12 Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.

13 I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living!

14 Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Sermon

For some, Christmas is over. Coming home the other night, I had to avoid a Christmas tree rolling forlornly across the street in the wind. Strands of tinsel still hanging limply on the limbs reflected the glow of my headlights. Can this be all that's left of the brightness of Christmas? Some have already taken down their Christmas lights and packed them away for their eleven-month hibernation. All too often, Christmas, comes and goes with no more lasting effect than the tinsel vainly clinging to a discarded tree. 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?

I.

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 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. He cries out to God begging for relief.

This song is a bit different. In this song, David boldly proclaims God as his light. There's a recognition that he may not immediately see everything as clearly as he wishes. In the last verse, he steels himself to "wait for the LORD" (v 14). But the psalm is punctuated with confidence. "My heart shall not fear" (v 3). "I will be confident" (v 3). "He will lift me" (v 5). "I will sing" (v 6). "I shall look upon . . . the LORD" (v 13).

"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. You've spent days, nights, in the darkness crying out to God for relief. Even tonight, 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.

"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. 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.

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 flashlight 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.

II.

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 v 2, David assumes this attack: "Evildoers assail me to eat up 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 v 3, David acknowledges the spiritual warfare that's taking place. 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: "Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear."

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.

III.

So, how can the psalmist be so certain that he will see the Lord? "I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (v 13). 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? 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 brothers and sisters, 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 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. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (8:12).

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, 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 recognizing 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.