

Israel's Greatest Hits Vol. II-Part 1
When In Doubt
Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well a few years back when I started going to the gym to try and get myself in better shape I would encounter a fitness employee. How shall I delicately say this? A fitness employee who wasn't very fit, put it that way. He was a big boy. And I don't mean big boy. I mean like BIG, BIG boy. He was not muscles, it was other things. And that wasn't the worst part of it because I can understand that because I was going in as a big boy, but he would be out on the bench outside on his breaks as I was coming in or when I was leaving I'd see him out there pounding the junk food, just going for it. And then between his burgers some time I'd be out there seeing him smoking a cigarette. I mean he was not a picture of health, this guy. And I remember thinking to myself as he wore his fitness gear, that he barely fit into, I thought to myself this poor guy is a bad billboard for what this place is supposed to be all about. Right? I thought if he were the one taking me on the tour, you know how they do that when you're about to join and they're going to show you the place, I just have a hard time believing his pitch about the value of the gym when he seemed to be the embodiment of everything opposite of what you'd hope this organization, this gym, would provide for you. It was a bit of a walking contradiction.

I fear that sometimes my non-Christian friends may feel that way about me and perhaps about us. So often when we give them this pitch about being right with the living God that, you know, if you follow Christ you're going to get reconciled to the creator of the universe, you're going to have a relationship with the Holy Spirit. You're going to be given an assurance that your sins are forgiven, you're going to have a guarantee of an eternal inheritance that's reserved and kept and guarded in heaven for you, that this is your good future. Then so often they see us sitting outside of church where we say all that stuff, sitting on the bench, if you will, at work or in our neighborhoods as they listen and watch our lives and say, "Well man, you don't seem very excited about all that. It doesn't seem like you really buy all that. It doesn't seem like the value of this church that you talk about is affecting you to the level of your attitude and your disposition." They see us doubting and fearful and discouraged and down. We think to ourselves well how can we possibly hold out the words of life and this positive message of having your life completely transformed by a real relationship with God, and we seem to be the embodiment of all that is opposite of what we say.

When King David, back a thousand years before Christ, was bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem for the first time, there was this big fanfare and everyone was excited about it and David had written a song just for that occasion. And he says, you know, this box of the Covenant, the Ark of the Covenant, this promise that God has made to his people, is now going to be here in Jerusalem. It's going to dwell in the capital city and everyone's going to know that our God, the great God of the universe, is among us. Here's a little bit of the lyrics of the song that he wrote from First Chronicles 16, it says, "All the gods of the people are worthless idols, but the real Lord," the God, Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God who "made the heavens, with him is splendor and majesty." And then he says this, that's who he is. And it says, "Strength and joy are in his place." That's talking about our response. God, the great God, is the real God. All the other gods that you chase, it's nonsense, it's bad, it's worthless. We got the answer, it's here. And you know what surrounds him, what characterizes his people? Two things: "strength and joy." Not doubt, not despair. "Strength and joy."

You might listen to David singing that song and writing that and celebrating and maybe you know even the historical circumstances in which David sits there and celebrates before the Lord the

arrival of the Ark in Jerusalem. You might say well that makes sense, I suppose, for him. He can be filled with strength and joy, he's the king after all. I mean, how great it would be just to be able to have, you know, everyone at your beck and call in this sovereign position as king. You've got people with palm branches and feeding you grapes and I don't know what it was like. You picture something and you think well, he had a cush life, everything was fine. Of course he can be happy and strong. He's got everything going his way. Everyone's for him.

Well of course if you know your Bible you know better than that. David did not have a cush life. Oh, there were times, when in his prosperity, things looked really good. But most of the time he was up against some very, very difficult situations. Matter of fact, many seasons of his life, it was filled with opposition, discouragement. It was filled with a lot of things that really came from his own life that was turned into a mess in part by his own decisions. It was a lot of suffering. There was a lot of pain. There was a lot of oppositions, a lot of problems.

And in the midst of all that, 18 years after he brought this Ark into Jerusalem and wrote a song about how great it was to live in the place where God dwelt among his people, where there are strength and joy, he wrote another song that I want you to look at this morning, that says sometimes life circumstances can make you feel contrary to all that. You can, with all that truth that God is among us, he is the God of our salvation and that we are his covenant people and that he dwells with us, all of that can be lost amid the pain of our circumstances. He writes a song in Psalm 3 that tries to get us to recalibrate our emotions and our disposition to say, "Listen, regardless of all of that, there is a lot that we should be rejoicing in." Doubt should not prevail. Discouragement, distress, despair, that's not what God wants from his people. He wants strength and joy and trust and confidence.

I want you to turn this psalm if you haven't already. We're going to study these eight verses this morning and be reminded that even in the midst of difficulty, no matter how difficult, painful, no matter what kind of trial you're going through, if you really are a genuine follower of Jesus Christ in our case, if you are a Christian, you've got something that should transcend ALL of the negative painful consequences in life, no matter if everyone is against you, where you can end your prayer and your thought and your time with the Lord coming out of it the way that David does here.

Look at this with me. I'll read from the English Standard Version, 8 verses, Psalm 3. It begins by telling us the setting, "A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son." He says, "O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God." Then that little term Selah, which we won't keep reading nor will we give any more comment to throughout our next 15 weeks of studying the Psalms. It's a musical notation of some kind that we really don't know etymologically. We can't quite figure out with any certainty what this word means. It's a lot like the word "maskil." We see these kinds of Hebrew words with no kinds of connection, at least to normal usage in common language. These are probably musical notations. If you start to track where they're used in the Psalms you understand they come between breaks in thought. Maybe this is a musical interlude or some kind of reference to some kind of instrumental something, some direction. Nevertheless, we will continue through this series without reference to them.

Nevertheless, here is the idea: "no salvation," it's terrible, this is awful. "But," here David responds and starts to adjust his attitude in the middle of all this, "O Lord, you're a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the Lord," perfect tense, past tense, "and he answered me from his holy hill." Looking back, as we pray, as we think about where God, at least the symbolic

presence and manifestation of God, is in Jerusalem, we prayed and you've answered. And he gets very practical, verse 5, "I lay down and slept; I woke again; for the Lord sustained me." Now the resolve, verse 6, "I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around. Arise, O Lord," present tense, "save me," now, God save me, "O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek," that's been your pattern, "you break the teeth of the wicked." I know you are a just God. I knew you settle the score. And then he can step back with this, a very confident, assured, trustful statement, "Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people."

This is a great Psalm that recalibrates David's thinking in a historical setting that is described in the superscription of the Psalm, "A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son." Now if he'd been with us in men's and women's Bible study you know the context. It's a context that I think helps us because in that context we realize not only do people like David have difficult times, those times can be so incredibly painful.

The kind of betrayal that comes from Absalom, his son, who's not a child at this point, he's a full-grown man, and he's after the throne of his father. If you've been studying it in our men's and women's Bible study, you know how terrible this situation was, as a coup was foisted by his own son, and David finds himself actually ousted from his own royal palace and sent across the Kidron valley up on the Mount of Olives and there's a lot of stuff happening that just completely humiliates David and his entourage as the shrinking band who was loyal to David kept getting smaller and smaller. Everybody who kept going and supporting his rebel son, Absalom, kept getting bigger and bigger. You can understand, verses 1 and 2, he's saying "how many are my foes," I can hardly count them. "Many are rising against me." The number of people against me it just continues to increase. They're saying of me, "Listen, you're a has-been, God is not going to save you from this trial. You've had so many bad things happen to you. We're going to write you off," "no salvation for him in God."

Now, I understand the word salvation here is about a temporal salvation. I mean, that word is used often in New Testament terms as it relates to our eternal salvation, where we're going to end up a thousand years from now. But here in the context, though we can always look beyond it to the eternal salvation we have, we recognize the problems here that are in the immediate foreground of David's life. The statement here is you're not going to get out of these. You're a loser. It's going to end in defeat. You're never going to find your way back to the palace and that's what's in view here. And David's saying, "My life is really in a mess right now," and yours might be too. And if it's not, I would venture to say it soon will be at some point where you will say I feel like everyone is against me, whether it's just some small area of your life. It may be in your office, it may be at your work, it may be in your industry, it could be in your family, it could be in your neighborhood, but you're going to say this is really getting really, really hard.

And the first bit of encouragement I want to give to you is going to sound counter-intuitive. You've heard it from this platform many times. But you need to understand this is the place to start. You want to turn your disposition back to where it needs to be: strength and joy, not doubt and despair. You need to get this one truth through your mind and it needs to be solid and in your mind. It sounds discouraging but it can be one of the most encouraging things that you hear this morning and that is, number one, you need to "Expect Painful Times." Number one, write it down, expect painful times.

You need to write that down as an encouragement because here's the thing, if you don't expect that



then you will be disillusioned in the Christian life. Because there are plenty of people who want to pitch you something and sell you stuff and pass the plate to tell you, "Listen, you need to know that if you follow Christ everything will be great for you." You need to understand that's nonsense. It's certainly not biblical. I recognize that there is something about expectations that have everything to do with my disposition. If I know what I'm getting into, if I count the cost and I walk into it knowing what the experience will be, it's going to change everything about how I respond to that stimuli. That is very, very important that you walk into Christian life knowing what Paul said to the early Christians in his sphere of influence and that is, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Or in the words of Christ, "In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart," we're going to get to the other side of this, we're going to get to the kingdom, "I've overcome the world."

Now so many Christians go to church, they sing great songs about salvation, about comfort, about hope, about help, and we all think that should be translated into all of that great things and we'll live with him for a million years and it'll be awesome and Christ will reign on the throne and we think, "Well, I'm not experiencing that now," and we get disillusioned.

I kind of like Saturdays around the church campus. There's always stuff going on in corners of the church campus. But when I go to my office, go to my study, it's kind of a nice and peaceful day for me to study and work and prepare to preach the sermons on the weekend because the normal office staff has the day off. So there's not a lot of buzz in the office and the phone doesn't ring and the intercom is not going off and it's great time for me to study. But there is one day that comes up quite often on our calendar where there is a buzz all through the hallways of the office and that's on the day we call to Fix-it Ministry Day. Maybe some of you are a part of it. I mean, like worker ants they spread out all over the campus and they get to work on our failing building which is a part of creation because everything in creation fails. But the reality is our building keeps breaking down because everything goes from order to disorder and there's always a need for patching and painting and working and shampooing carpets or whatever it might be. So we have a great team of volunteers who come here and they start, I've smelled it, with a wonderful breakfast that I smell, breakfast burritos and they just eat all this food and they pray together and they get together and it seems like a great thing and then they spread out on the campus and try to fix all the problems.

Now they come, I'm assuming, in the morning recognizing the day they're going to have, a day of work, sweat, ladders, tools, working on things, crawling under things, crawling into the rafters, crawling up on the roof. They're going to do a lot of stuff on this campus and it's a lot of work. They don't think they're coming for breakfast and fellowship and then after that we're going to sit around, put our feet up, tell stories, tell jokes, laugh together, watch a movie. That is not what they're expecting. They're expecting difficulties and challenges. Now they can do that with a good attitude and often they do. Sometimes I hear a little bad attitude out in the hallway when things aren't going well, but I recognize this: they know what they're signing up for. And generally speaking they're there helping each other, encouraging each other, because they know it's not a day to hang out, put our feet up and relax. It's going to be a challenging day. And so they come expecting that. That expectation can help calibrate their response to every negative thing that happens. Because they know this is not a promise of tranquility and peace. God gives us peace but he gives us peace here in our heart. He doesn't give us peace out there.

And it's very important to know that for three basic reasons. If you're taking some sub-points here under number one, I might put it this way. I'll give you six words, three points. Ready? Number one, here's why, number one, "A Fallen World." Fallen world. Here's the number one reason you're

not going to have a great time between now and the kingdom, it's because we live in a fallen world. Genesis 3. Need I say more? Genesis 3. Something we generally don't have our children memorized for Awana. You won't find that on any greeting cards. You're not going to see it in, you know, framed posters on the wall at the Christian bookstores. It's called, here's the heading, The Curse. You can understand why we're not going to have that as a greeting card. The Curse. "Well, who's cursing who?" God is cursing us. "Well, that doesn't sound like a fun passage." It's not.

It is the result of what we're dealing with now comes from that declarative statement from God. And he said because you guys have now chosen to rebel against me and your heart now is fallen and corrupt, I'm going to put you in an environment that reminds you of that, that matches your heart and that puts within your purview or within your reach something that is imperfect as you are and that's a good thing. As I often say he's not giving a perfect weapon to imperfect people. He's making this world a frustrated world. And in part, that's a safety feature, that's a governor, that's a mitigation on our evil, because we can't even plant stuff in the ground without weeds and thistles growing up because the reality is this world's going to be a frustrating place because our hearts have been fallen.

So God says, "Cursed is the ground because of you." So all of a sudden now he says you're going to go to work but it's going to be irritating. You're going to have relationships, and he starts to speak to the only relationship at that point humanly that exists and that is between a husband and wife, and he says it's going to be messed up. You're going to have frustrating relationships. You're gonna have irritating work. And because you're made of the dirt of the earth, I said "Cursed is the ground because of you," and I made you out of the ground, everything in your body now is going to start to break down. That's going to be frustrating. You'll have disease and sickness. So I've got, difficulty, sickness, pain, frustrated relationships and then it ends with this: you're going to die. You're not all going to die at the same time, which means you're going to have to see each other die. You're going to have all the separation from death. You're going to mourning and pain and crying and death. Here's my sentence upon a world of sin.

Now anybody who stands up in a church, on a platform, in an arena and tells you, "Listen, become a Christian and everything will go great." You need to raise your hand and ask the question, "Is the curse of Genesis 3 no longer applicable to me?" And sometimes they try to play a game that gets people to believe that. But it's not true. Every faith healer dies. Mark my words, if they're not dead yet they're going to, every single one of them. They may promise you health, wealth and prosperity, but everyone's health is going to deteriorate, everyone's going eventually going to die and all that wealth that they thought they could accumulate, usually on the backs of people who believe their lie, is not going to go with them. It's doesn't work. Fallen world, that's the reason you and I are going to have a hard time and none of us are exempt from that.

Number two, Letter B. We need to understand "We Have a Fierce Enemy." We live in a fallen world and once you, as Tozer said, "Once you put yourself under the plenary authority of Christ you now invite the enemy to put a target on your back." That's the Mike Fabarez paraphrase of Tozer, but that's it. You now are targeted by a fierce enemy. We read in the Daily Bible Reading this morning about the gazelle. I thought of that when I read that it took me back to Sunday nights when that program was on when I was a kid where, you know, it was a National Geographic or whatever, and I remember watching in horror as a little kid as the gazelle got eaten by the lion. I don't know why that was on TV so blatantly and openly. It scarred my suburban brain as a child. I'd never seen that kind of thing before. I thought what a crazy thing, these gazelles running around and the lion pounces on them. And here's what First Peter 5 says: you're the gazelle. Right? And we now have

the lion. That lion is not unleashed on you until you put your faith and trust in Christ. Now all of a sudden, he's got a new reason to target you. He may come to steal, kill and destroy, but he's coming after you in particular because he's a "roaring lion seeking," not a gazelle but "seeking someone," as Peter speaks to his congregation, "someone here to devour."

And here's the reality. Here's another good verse to jot down, Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 2. Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 2. When we deal with problems like Absalom, when we deal with problems like Shimei. If you went to men's and women's Bible study that's a recently familiar name to you. As David is going across the Kidron Valley and up the slopes of the Mount of Olives, as he's leaving dejected as an ousted king while his rebel son is taking the throne, Shimei picks up stones, it says, and starts throwing at him, saying, "Cursed is you. You're cursed. Get out of here you man of blood." Be gone. And here is David taking the derision of a punk, if you will, like Shimei, and I'm thinking to myself you have all these opponents and they're growing and you're saying, "How many are my foes! Many are rising and many are saying of my soul, there is no salvation for him in God." And I think to myself when you look at that, what is behind all of that?

Well I think the immediate cause you can say is Shimei, Absalom and all the rest. But here's the thing, the Bible makes it clear from Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 2 that there is, I'll put it in terms of the passage, there are people who, "Follow the course of the world, they follow the prince of the power of the air, they have that spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience," and they become the adversaries of the people of God, always. In other words, the cultural problems that we face, and you may be in the middle of a relational conflict, you may be in the middle of some kind of legal trouble, you might be dealing with rebellious cells in your body and you've got some kind of bad diagnosis in your health, you may even be me dealing with the loss of a loved one, all of those things ultimately the Bible says is the adversary who's working against the people of God. And he uses these people to get this done. Our culture is pitted against biblical Christianity in a way that is ramping up in our day. America has been a nice little enclave for a while where at least we've had a lot of peace and even cultural support and applause for our Christian biblical values. Have you noticed that that's all evaporated? Have you noticed that? It's gone.

And now it's no longer like, "Well, you believe what you believe, I believe what I believe." And not only are we saying, "Well, listen I don't believe your stupid theories about God, I'm an atheist." We no longer have atheists ruling the intellectual elite of our day. We have anti-theists leading in the intellectual elites of our day. They're now opposed to this. I mean, I'm looking at signs and billboards. I'll quote a couple that I saw. "Religion means never reaching your full potential as a human being." "You believe in religion, you believe in God, you believe in these invisible fairies? Listen, you'll never be the person you should be. So follow our thinking and just get over this God thing." Here's another one on the side of a bus I saw. "There's probably no God, so stop worrying and start enjoying your life." Right? "Really, you guys are a bunch of killjoys. You just really need to get away from this stuff. If you'd stop thinking there's a teacher at the front of the classroom and just start living your life with the freedom and liberty that we have, then everything will be fine."

I remember this one not long after 9/11, certainly as the Hitchens and Dawkins and Dennetts of the day started to rise in their popularity, I saw this one: "Science flies you to the moon..." Right? In other words, technology and science are great. "But religion flies you into skyscrapers." That's what religion does, all you religious fanatics. That's the kind of hostile opposition that is continuing to increase in our day. You cannot be a biblical Christian with a biblical mindset and a Christian worldview and not think that it's only going to get worse for us. Here's the forecast: it's going to go from bad to worse. "Well, this has been an encouraging sermon so far, Pastor Mike." It can be

encouraging to you because if you're sitting around with your head in your hands saying, "Why is my life so difficult? Why is it these things have happened? Why do I have cancer? Why did my loved one die? Why am I having problems at work? Why am I being sued? Why am I being unjustly targeted?" All of those things, you're going to find that it's an encouragement to you to sit back and say this: when you suffer, just remember Christ suffered too. And if he was exempt, I guess you could think that you're exempt. But he wasn't exempt and neither are you.

First John Chapter 3 says, "Listen, don't be surprised when the world hates you." And the example it starts with is Cain and Abel. You become a follower of Christ just like you had Abel doing what God wanted, you're going to have those who don't want to do what God wants targeting you. And Satan would love to take you to a place of complete despair and doubt and frustration by the circumstances of your life. And even Job, who was a godly man, and Satan had his way with Job, he took everything out from underneath him and he was tested. And you might be being tested right now in your life, but just remember this, it's all in the forecast.

The fallen world, you're not exempt from that, a fierce enemy, that's been ramped up since you've been a Christian, then number three. You might be raising your hand at this point saying, "Well, wait a minute Mike, you're not really telling us what's happening here with Absalom because I know, I've been in men's Bible study, I've been in women's Bible study, I know this was ultimately a reverberating effect of David's sin. You're right. So let's put that down. Letter C, "A Faulty Walk." We live in a fallen world, I understand that, we have a fierce enemy, and you and I are going to have a faulty spiritual life, a faulty walk with Christ. And that is going to often times bring difficulty into our lives where it's not the enemy out there who is causing us trouble, we found ourselves to be our own worst enemy. Right? And that was certainly true in David's life.

His sin with Bathsheba was one thing. He took it to a whole another level by trying to cover this up and have Uriah, her husband, killed. He became a murderer and an adulterer, and then he goes, as Nathan confronts him, he confesses his sin and God says, "OK you're forgiven. But there's going to be consequences," starting with the death of this baby and how devastating that was for Bathsheba and David. But it didn't stop there. The consequences reverberated all the way to Absalom, not being a man of peace, congeniality, harmonious participation in his father's reign. No, it was all about, "I want your throne and I want you out and I'm going to start a conspiracy against you in a coup d'etat and I'm going to lead you out of town. I'm going to be the winner, you're going to be the loser. You're going to be my enemy, dad, and I'm going to take over everything you've done here."

And here's the thing, if you and I sit here and stop thinking in general terms and think in specific terms when the Bible says in James Chapter 3, "All of us stumble in many ways." All of us stumble in many ways. You can look at a passage like that and say, "Yeah, we're not perfect." But think about what that statement is really saying. That you and I as Christians, no matter how much we're working and progressing in our progressive sanctification, there are things that we do that grieve the Holy Spirit of God. And the Holy Spirit of God, if you press him long enough, he will step up and he will discipline your life and you will find yourself to be the cause of a lot of the pain in your own life.

And since you and I are going to have this statement be true about us until we reach the kingdom, and that is "We all stumble in many ways," you know that a lot of things that are going to happen in your life are going to be because you're not a perfect child of God yet. And God is going to have to discipline you. Just like David said in retrospect in this passage, as he said in Psalm 119 verse 71, he said, "It was good that I was afflicted, that I might learn to keep your statutes." And it was that

this was a part of the discipline of his life to where later he could learn to do what God asked him to do. And so you and I are going to go through the discipline of the Lord. You are the child of a disciplinarian. You may not have grown up with a human disciplinarian but here's the thing, God is a disciplinarian. He wants you to be holy like he's holy. And so you and I are going to have trouble. Expect painful times. Fallen world. Fierce enemy. Faulty walk.

That may make it tough for us but here we can turn the corner just like David starts to in Psalm 3 verse 3. Let's now start to recognize this, that though it may be hard for us for a lot of reasons, "The Lord is a shield about me." Even when the problem comes from my own sin, how often do we see God stepping in and graciously saying, "OK, I'm going to protect you now."

"My glory, and the lifter of my head," verse 3. Three things. The Lord is a shield about me, my glory and the lifter of my head. Let's start with the last line. I know that it's even found its way into the lyrics of modern worship songs and we often sing it without thinking about what that means. "The lifter of my head." Think about it, the doubt and the despair and the discouragement and the distressing spirit that David should have when he's surrounded by all these enemies, droops his head down. The picture here is God is, two things, shield and glory, and that's going to lift his head. He's going to have the lifting of the head as at least the visible expression of a man who can look at the future with hope, who can have the confidence, who can have the joy and strength that he needs to march through his life with God, the lifter of his head.

He bases it on two things. God is a shield and God is his glory. Let's think those things through. Shield and glory get me to the place of saying I can have hope, I can face the future with strength. Shield. In the ancient world, in the ancient Near East, there were two kinds of shields. There was one that they would give to the infantry. You would go out and fight. You can picture these, you've seen them on reliefs and archaeological finds. They'll have, you know, some kinds of pictures and sculptures of guys with these round shields. They were kind of small. You would take it into battle and you'd run with it, you'd have your spear or you'd have your sword or whatever it might be, your knife, your dagger, and you'd have that shield. That's not the shield in view here.

The shield, I'm sure, that David was envisioning was the kind of ancient near eastern shield of the 10th century B.C. that these guys would use that would come up to the top of your head. It would encircle you like a half circle and it would have sometimes a slit in the shield and you would hide behind it. It was a semi-circle shield. That's the picture here. God is like that shield around me. Whether it's just the fallenness of the world, sickness and death and disease and all kinds of frustration, or whether it's the enemy attacking me with his arrows, as Paul put it in Ephesians 6, or whether it's even stuff that I've done that's coming back to haunt me, this sowing and reaping, God is a God that ultimately is a shield about me.

God, even though he's allowing it, God even though that he mandated it in Genesis 3, God even though that he brought it because of discipline in my life, he is a God who mitigates, who comforts, who mercifully protects me. He is the ultimate protection in my life. And here's the thing I need to have any hope to lift my head. I need to sense that I am secure. And this is the ultimate security for Christians, that no matter what happens, God is my helper, in the sense he has the protection of my life. He is the security that I need to know this, as Paul said it, even if I die as a martyr, Second Timothy Chapter 4, I know he will "bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom."

As Paul said in Philippians 1, even though I might die in this Roman prison, he said this: "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." I purpose now to glorify God whether by my life or by my death. It

may be strange but remember David understood that. That even if this killed him, even if this led to his ultimate demise and beheading, he had statements like this: I know this, "Surely goodness and mercy," and I know we translate this, "follow me." It's really a much stronger Hebrew word, it will chase me down, it will hunt me down. I'm being hunted now by Saul but here it is: "Surely goodness and mercy," will hunt me down, "shall follow me all the days of my life and I will," do you know the next line, "dwell in the house of the Lord," how long, "forever."

Here's the thing, no matter if this cancer kills you, no matter if this pain crushes you, no matter if this lawsuit makes you destitute, no matter if this marriage ends in divorce, no matter what happens, your ultimate security is in a God who says, "I am your shield. I am your protector. I'm going to bring you safely into my kingdom. It may get hard but your ultimate protection is in me and you'll never hear from me, 'Depart from me, I never knew you.'" If you're a Christian that is the ultimate security. That can start to lift your head.

How about this enigmatic phrase: my glory, my glory. That is a bit of a mysterious word in the Old Testament, often spoken but rarely understood. But in this context clearly here is a king who no longer seems to have much glory. He's lost his throne, he's lost his crown, he's lost the respect of the people. Now they're throwing rocks at him as he leaves the town. He's got no glory, but he has glory. His glory isn't in a crown, his glory isn't in an army, his glory isn't in his family being good, his glory is in the fact that he has God. God is my glory. God is my protector, that's my ultimate security, and God is my glory.

If I lose everything else but I still have God, God is my glory. "If God is for me who can be against me?" That's what Paul said in Romans 8. If the Lord is my shepherd I can walk through the valley of the shadow of death and there's no one left but me and the shepherd, and I won't fear because you are with me. That picture of having God when everything else falls apart is in the Bible something that should grant us that ultimate significance. I know I'm significant because I know who my dad is. I know who my shepherd is. God is not going to forsake me. He will never cast me out. No one is going to snatch me from his hand, to speak of a New Testament reference to the good shepherd. The reality of that, think about that, two things that all of us crave as human beings. I want to be secure. I'd like to have significance. I've got that in God. Nothing in my circumstances can change that. Do you think that I can lift your head? That can lift your head.

What are we talking about? Hope, strength? How's that going to happen? Verse 4. Let me give you now verses 4 and 5 is the way to get this done and let's get our point from this section. "I cried to the Lord." This is in the perfect tense. This has happened in the past. "And he answered me from his holy hill." I remember that I prayed and God has done what I have asked. He has answered me in the past. Number two on your outline, let's put it this way. He starts by getting that lifted head by recalling God's faithfulness. "Recall God's Faithfulness" in your life. You want some practical steps this morning? I want you to start keeping track of the answers to prayer. Some of you are doing that already. Step it up. Redouble your efforts to have the answers to God's prayer chronicled in your life.

I had someone just yesterday say to me right before I stepped up to preach, "Hey, you know what? I asked for this and God did this. Here's a very specific and dramatic answer to my prayer." And the first thing I said is what I often say, and I wasn't going miss saying it because I was about to preach this message. I said, "Write it down. Put it in a book, put it on a Word doc, get it in a journal, write that down, don't forget it." Now, I often say, depending on how well I know the person, and I didn't say it yesterday, but I thought it, because I thought, you know what, because times are going to get

tough. And there'll be times when you don't think God is hearing anything that you're saying. Your prayers will be hitting the ceiling and you feel like where is God in all of this? I want you to look back at the answers to prayer. God is a God who has been faithful to you in the past. He did it to you this week, he answered your prayer, write it down, chronicle it, remember it, and then get back and recall it. When the times are dark, go back to where God has shown his light of faithfulness in your life. You've got to write down the answers to prayer.

And because David speaks about praying to God, crying out to God, and he says "you answered me from your holy hill," that's what God did. And I think of that Mount Mariah, that place where the temple by his son would eventually be built, the center of the worship in Israel. I know that when he prayed, and I can look back on this historically, often he wasn't just praying for himself. "You know, I got a problem, I'm not feeling well. Help me." Yeah, personal answers to prayer. Absolutely write them down.

But I like to broaden this a little bit. Not only do I want you to recall God's faithfulness and answers to your prayers. I want you to think about the way God has answered prayers for his people, how God has been faithful to his people. See, for me to have hope about my future I've got to know this: God not only answered my prayers in the past but, you know what, when the people of God have sought God, God has been faithful to his people.

Jot this reference down if you would, Jeremiah Chapter 31 verses 35 through 37. Jeremiah 31 verses 35 through 37. When I think about Israel in the Old Testament, a millennia before Christ, here is this picture of a group of people who if you watched the trajectory of their history you'd say, "I can't imagine they're going to make it through the tough times that are coming." If I actually got on the timeline with them and I walked through those events, I would think when Nebuchadnezzar came and destroyed the temple, I would think we're done, ransacked the place, took people captive. I'm thinking Israel is no more. That's what I would think. Well, Jeremiah was about to go into that and he was telling these people you have sinned, you've blown it, God is now disciplining you in a big way. But let me tell you this, he's going to be faithful to you as a people. He will be faithful to you as a nation.

Let me read for you this passage. He speaks now of a fixed order of things. He speaks of the sun by day. He speaks of the fixed order of the moon and the stars by night. Then he asked this question in verse 36. He says, "Listen, if this fixed order departs from before me," if you see that happen? Right? If you're asking me about my relationship with my people. Well then you would know that "the offspring of Israel will cease to be a nation before me." Then you'll know that. If you look up and you don't see the sun in the daytime, there's no light up there. If you look up at night and the moon has fallen out of the sky. If there are no stars. Well then you'll know, I'm done with you guys. Now you're going to go to the doghouse, you're going to be disciplined, and David was going to the doghouse certainly by being exiled here and part of it was because of his own sin. But God says even in the depths as you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I'm not done with you.

If you look nationally at Israel you would think that when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple, you'd think that when Antiochus Epiphanes, Antiochus the Fourth, destroyed the temple in the inter-testamental period, you'd think that when Titus the Roman emperor came in 78 A.D. and destroyed the temple. Listen to this next line, verse 37. "Thus says the Lord: 'If the heavens above can be measured, if the foundations of the earth below can be explored...' Now, we haven't done either. We can kind of figure out things by the diameter of the earth but no one's taken a submarine down to the inner core of the planet, and no one understands the vastness of space. We can only



guesstimate at that kind of thing. He said, but if you could do that, well, then I can cast off. "I will cast off Israel for all that they have done."

In other words, I know they've done bad but I'm not done with them. I'm a faithful God to my covenant promises. I'm thinking to myself you can run it forward through what some of you just learned in the message in the last hour about World War II and Hitler's regime, the Nazis against the Jewish people, you can think how in the world is it that I've got some of our congregants getting ready next week to get on a plane, a hundred of them, to go to Israel to visit the land where they've got the Star of David on flags all around the country. How is it they're still there? That is amazing.

There's not a country or group of people who are more embattled than Israel. And I'm saying that's a testament right there to God saying, they're going to survive. Do they accept and embrace Christ right now? No. By and large they don't. I understand that. They're enemies of the cross as Paul said in Romans. But they're beloved for the sake of the Patriarchs. God has a plan for them and God's not done with them yet. There's to be a great revival of Israel at the end of time where they turn to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, you're going to see a great revival there. That's what the Bible predicts. But I think about how faithful God is. When you think there's no chance, God shows he's faithful to his people.

And by the way, I know that you're not part of national Israel but you are part of the church and Jesus said something similar in Matthew Chapter 16. He said, "I'm going to build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." The church has been through World War II. The church has been through the persecutions of the Roman Empire. The church right now, as it gets darker in our culture, is going to go through a lot of stuff. We're not going to budge on biblical truth. We're not going to fudge on the authority of Scripture. We're not going to change our view on sexual ethics or gender or anything else. And then we're going to be persecuted. You're going to see pastors go to jail in our country. You're going to see perhaps persecution break out like it has in many places around the globe. That may happen. Matter of fact, I expect that to happen because I expect difficult times.

But I know this: when it comes what God is going to do with his church, the church is going to survive. The church is going to thrive. The gates of hell itself cannot prevail against the church and I'm a part of that organization. I'm on a winning team. You think that can lift my head? Yeah. How do I need to get that? Think about answered prayer, think about God's fidelity to his people.

And then one more thing, verse 5. Those are big issues are they not? They seem theologically rich. They seem exciting to roll my sleeves up and understand God's faithfulness to his people. But it says now, "I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me." Now we're getting into like ridiculously small things. I go from big things, crying out to the national center of the nation of Israel and thinking about God's faithfulness and how he's answered. And now I'm thinking about I just went to sleep last night. This is at least day two of the exile of David. He's looking back at his former night's sleep and he says, "I went to sleep, I woke up, I credit God with that kind of sustenance. I know God is a faithful God even in the little things." I guess if you're taking notes I'd put it down this way: I keep track of God's faithfulness and answers to my prayers, I am certainly going to note God's faithfulness to his people, and then thirdly, I need to start paying attention to his faithfulness in the little things, the little things.

When I moved out of my house my mom summarily threw away most of my stuff, I found out. I had a drawer full of things that were important to me including baseball cards. I'm going to forgive

my mom eventually for that, throwing those all away. But it's funny now that things are starting to trickle back decades later. My mom recently brought a box with some things of some of the books I had when I was a little kid and found my first Bible and some things, it was interesting to kind of thumb through all that. But one little book that she had in there was called Prayers for Little Ones. And it was the first book I had on prayer and just a tiny little hardback green olive-green little book, and I started to thumb through that this week.

And it had been sitting there on my shelf for a while but I grabbed it and started reading and I found a prayer that I know you've heard. It's the kind of prayer that I would simplistically look at, as a kind of a guy who tries to take myself seriously as knowing the Bible and understanding the Bible and teaching the Bible, I would look at this kind of prayer and I would scoff at it. I just can't help but admit that's how my natural intuitive reaction is to a prayer like this. And yet there it was on page 15 and in light of what I was studying this week in this passage I couldn't help but say that's exactly the kind of way Christians should think about God's faithfulness in the little things.

Here's the prayer, I know you've heard it: "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. Keep me safe through the night and wake me with the morning light. If I should die before I wake, I pray thee Lord my soul to take." And across the page from page 15 was a sketch on page 14 of a little kid in his little ancient nightgown on, this was published in 1923. I was not a child in 1923, just so you know that (smile). This is an old book when I got it. This little sketch of this little kid in his nightgown, praying, kneeling by his bedside. And I thought well that's how whoever put this book together is trying to teach little kids to pray. And I would scoff at that, it was just ridiculous.

You know how much more godly I think we would be, perhaps getting to the goal of this sermon, how much more joyful and strengthen we would be if we would start to note the little things that God does for us. If you last night went to bed and said, "God, I'm laying down to sleep. I pray that you'd keep me till the morning, keep me safe through the night. And when I wake by the morning light I want to rejoice in the fact that you kept me alive. And if I don't live to the morning, I pray that you'll take my soul and that I'll be with you." And you start praying that, a prayer that I think, maybe like me, you have just dismissed as silly childhood talk. I think we'd be much more excited about the fact that God is involved, even when things are going wrong at work or in your family or in your life.

On the next page a new prayer for little kids: "Thy favor gives me daily bread." Were we not convicted last week in the sermon about that? Even down to the things we eat every day. "Your favor gives me daily bread and friends who all my needs supply. And safely now I rest my head, preserved and guarded by thine eye." Even when David was down he looked at his sleep and he said, "You know what? I'm alive because of God's intervention." The faithfulness of God in the little things.

That's a godly prayer. It's not an ungodly prayer. Certainly in light of what Paul said to the professors in Athens at the Areopagus in Acts 17, he says, "God gives us life, he gives us breath and he gives us everything else." You know what he gave you last night? Sleep. An hour less than you wanted because of the change to Daylight Saving Time, but he gave sleep. And you woke up this morning. And perhaps that prayer from 1923 to teach little kids to recognize this, if you wake up in the morning it was God's goodness and his faithfulness to you.

Well, he may have taken some things away from you, he may be putting you through a trial, you

may be reaping a bit of what you've sown in terms of things that you don't want to experience but God's keeping you in that fire for a while. But just know in the midst of all that he has answered your prayers in the past, he is not silent, he's not passive, he's not deaf, he can hear you. He's been faithful to his people through the centuries and he was even faithful to you last night when you went to bed and woke up in the morning.

Therefore the resolve of verse 6, go back to our passage, Psalm 3:6, "I will not be afraid." I will not be afraid. There's the resolve. Let's put it down that way. Number three, you need to "Resolve to be Fearless." What's the opposite of doubt? You say, well trust. Well, that's true. But the kind of trust the Bible talks about is a fearless confidence. David is surrounded by people but he says I'm not going to be afraid. There is a fearlessness about the fact I am resolved to be fearless. "Well, it may be really bad." It is. I will not be afraid of, look at verse 6, "many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around." Well, what do I have all around me? I have the shield of God. Ultimately, I may lose this battle, I could lose my life over this but ultimately I have the ultimate security in God, I have the ultimate sense of significance. He is my glory. He's answered my prayers in the past, he's faithful to his people. He was faithful to me last night when I went to bed.

Now I know this: there's no need for me to look at the future with fear. There's no need for me to look at the future with doubt. There is no need for me to look at this with a dour attitude in distress. I am saying things about me being related to the living God. I have hope. I have a future. I have a promise that I can put in terms of Psalm 23. "Surely goodness and mercy are going to chase me down all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." If that's true, it doesn't matter who's against me. I'm not going to be afraid.

And what am I going to do in the midst of my pain? I'm going to arise and say to the Lord, "Save me." It may not happen right now. It may not happen next week. And the salvation may come at the end of a struggle with a disease or a problem or a foe or persecuted government. But I'm going to get to the place where I know, like Paul said in Second Timothy 4, I'm going to be arriving "safely into the heavenly kingdom." "Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God. You strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked." And it's not just the physical enemies that we experience that will one day be made right as they bowed down before the King of kings and Lord of lords. You understand every demonic spirit, even Satan himself, will be defeated. He will look, and you and I will look in triumph over our foes.

A great passage that always reminds me of the call and need to be fearless. Psalm 118 verses 6 and 7, "The Lord is at my side, I will not fear. What can man do to me?" Well, he can do a lot. David knows that. "The Lord is on my side as my helper. I shall look in triumph on those who hate me," and so will I. No one hates me more than demonic spirits. The demonic spirit that's now at work in the sons of disobedience that happens even within the church, as Paul said to Timothy, there are people captivated by Satan within the church to do his will. All those who are opposed to the good and godly things that God wants to do in and through my life I know ultimately they will not win. Even if a "thousand people set themselves against me all around," even if the odds are against me completely.

Do you think David knows anything about being on the losing end of the oddsmakers? Absolutely. It was 40 years before this that David stood as a teenager in the Valley of Elah when he went to bring some bread and cheese to his older brothers in battle, that he watched that big gigantic ugly thug of a Philistine warrior stands there and mock and defy and curse God and the armies of Israel. And David was filled with jealousy, a godly jealousy, and zeal. And he finally goes to Saul the



king, "Like well who's going to do something about this?" And finally so convinced by the determination and the courage and the fearlessness of David, Saul says, "Good, put on all this armor," and none of the armor fit.

So David said, "Listen, I've killed a bear. I've killed a lion. I can use this slingshot. I'm going to go out there and do it." Well, as he gets a chance to speak to Goliath here's what he says, First Samuel 17:45. He says, "Hey Philistine, you come against me with a sword and a spear and a javelin," and those are intimidating weapons, "but I come against you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the Lord God of the armies of Israel who you're defying."

Listen to this, verse 46, talk about determination. "This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, I'll strike you down and I'll cut off your head." And that's exactly what happened. God took a little boy, a teenage kid, who had faith and confidence that God would not be defied. He didn't care what the anti-theist said, we shouldn't care what the antichrists of our generation say. We should say, God is my God, he is my shield, he's my glory, he's the lifter of my head. It does it matter what kind of disease, what kind of death, what kind of problem, what kind of financial issues I'm facing, I am going to face the future fearlessly.

God will get me through this. Because in the end all the enemies will be defeated because salvation belongs to the Lord. And therefore I can say that God's blessing is going to be, has been, and will be for me upon the people of God. And David stood there before Goliath. The last thing he said before he started to rush toward Goliath was, because of this defiance, you need to know that because I'm going to kill you and all the Philistines are going to die in this valley, everyone's going to know that the Lord saves, not with a sword and not with a spear, because the battle is the Lord's. He's going to give you into my hands.

"Salvation belongs to the Lord," verse 8. Can I leave you with this practical reminder? You and I can look at this passage and say, "Yeah, my attitude needs to be recalibrated. I need my disposition brought up, I need not be dour, down, doubting. I need to face my future with confidence and joy and strength and courage because I know the Lord is the one who brings salvation." You can know that theoretically, but you can still reach toward the means. You can look at the javelin and the spear and the sword and you can say, I need a better javelin, I need a better spear, I need a better sword. In other words, you can have a cancerous diagnosis, I just need better doctors, I need better medication. God's all for doctors and medication. You can have a financial issue and you can say I need better lawyers. God is all for lawyers. You can say, well I have a problem here. I need a good biblical counselor. God is all for good biblical counseling. But you better not put your hope in the means of God's salvation, you ought to know salvation belongs to the Lord. The blessing is upon his people because God cares for his people through the intermediate means of the things that he's going to use to get that done. Absolutely.

He was David's great, great grandson who failed at this at the end of his life, just like David did. David went out at the end of his life and counted his troops because he started to shift his focus from the Lord who saves, not by sword, not by shield, not by javelin, but saves because he cares for his people. It doesn't mean that David shouldn't have a standing army. He should have a standing army and he had one. But he shouldn't put his trust in it and he did that by numbering the people.

His great, great grandson, Asa, did the same exact thing when he was hit with a medical problem. That may be exactly where you're at right now. And the Bible uses this pretty strong Hebrew verb which speaks of the reality of what Asa didn't do. King Asa did a great thing like David. He cared

about godliness and reform. He took down all the Asherah poles. He went after all the idolatry. He cleaned up the nation but when it came to a trial in his life, at the end of his life, after 39 years on the throne, he got sick. The Bible says a disease in his feet. And it says, "He did not," a strong word, he did not chase after, "seek" after, pursue "the Lord" in that. Instead, "he pursued the physicians."

Again, God is all for physicians. Matter of fact, you see in the Bible many situations of seeking the help of physicians. But it's not because I think salvation belongs in physicians. Your protection does not belong in alarm systems or guns. Your protection and your health does not belong in medications and the pharmacy and your doctors. Your protection at work does not belong to books or strategies or management skills or lawyers. Salvation belongs to the Lord, which means you first seek the Lord and then he brings the means in and you utilize the means to get that salvation accomplished in your life and praise the Lord. In many cases it happens and the blessing is evident in the here and now, the temporal salvation of God. We see God turn things around. But make sure your trust is in him. Make sure that you know that salvation is from the Lord. Asa failed in that and after two years of suffering in his disease he died in the 41st year of his reign all because he sought the wrong thing. He looked at the means instead of the source.

David had troubles. Absalom, his son, was his enemy. God would depose him, his enemy that is, and David would re-ascend the throne and he would have a season where he was back exactly where he needed to be. It was through a painful situation that he would have to fight back, really as God fought for him, to get that throne back. But what he needed in this particular time as he camped out under the stars as a refugee of his own son, he needed an adjustment of his attitude, no fear, no doubt, no despair, no weakness. He needed courage and assurance and joy and strength.

And he found those things through this kind of thinking and I want you to do the same. The same kind of thinking that was needed 420 years before this when his ancestors were outside the Promised Land. They'd been through a lot of tests that they had failed. And yet God was going to put Joshua in place, Moses had died. There was a lot of reasons to doubt and despair and a lot of reasons to think we can't do this. But God gives him some classic, memorable instructions that we do teach our kids in Awana. These are memory verses for our kids. You need to know this is exactly what we need when we face the kinds of opposition, we face the kind of pain, the difficulty, the loss that you might be thinking of as I preach this sermon.

And it's as though God just wants to drive this home as strongly as possible. He repeats over and over again in this passage. Listen to it. "Be strong," he tells Joshua, "be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land, the land that I swore to their fathers to give them." I'm going to keep my promises. You need to trust me, you need to be strong and courageous. Next verse, "Only just be strong," and now he adds this word, "very courageous. Just be careful to do what's in the word," do what I've told you in the word. Don't doubt my word. Then he ends with this, two verses later. "Have I not commanded you?" I've said it. He says it again. "Be strong and be courageous. Do not be frightened, do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

When you're tempted to doubt, Psalm 3 is the answer. God's Word, the living and active word, I trust will give you joy and trust and confidence and strength and hope. Don't despair. Don't sit here and tell people we have the answer, that we have a God as our God, that he's our Father. That we have an eternal hope that outshines any kind of problem that we have in this life. That the glory to be revealed to us is better than any of the pain and suffering we have. Don't say that and then walk out of the church and be filled with that kind of fear and doubt and despair and weakness, we see so



many Christians hypocritically expressing to this non-Christian world. Get out there and smile at your future. Be confident that the Lord is your God, that he'll walk you through whatever you're going through. Recognize that we have a peace that surpasses all understanding and it doesn't mean that our circumstances are peaceful. It means that our heart is at peace even in the midst of the most tumultuous times. Expect painful times, recall God's faithfulness and always resolve to look at your future fearlessly.

Let's pray. God, in our day we have a lot of challenges and it's getting worse corporately for us in our culture. But for whatever pain there might be in this room right now that's causing doubt and fear, I pray that you might help us dispel that by the same pattern of thinking that we find in Psalm 3. Please God, help us to cling to the fact that you are a God who has always been faithful to your people. You don't answer when we want often times, you make us wait. Sometimes the trials we go through are an affliction we brought upon ourselves. But even to that affliction let us say as Psalm 119 says, that it's good that we go through these things. We want to learn to trust you and obey you.

God, make us better children who trust you the way we ought to. Whatever the problem is in our lives, let us not think about people down the road, let us think about our own lives right now and learn to trust you as we ought to. To face the future with the kind of confidence that we should have, expressing the reality of our faith in the truth of who you are and letting it affect our disposition. God, thanks for this church, thanks for these people. I know we go through so many things and it's really ramping up. But I pray that you'd comfort us with the truth that we've learned this morning, that it might encourage us and fuel us to face our week with courage and confidence.

In Jesus name. Amen.