



**Israel's Greatest Hits Vol. II-Part 14**  
**The Lord is My Strength**  
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Well, I think you would agree how interesting it is that we human beings can be so easily lulled into believing that we are secure. You can think that. Of course, it's really an illusion. There are a million things that could go wrong at any moment that would show our vulnerability and our defensiveness and our weakness. And yet, we have this sense that everything's OK if everything goes OK today, it'll go OK tomorrow, it'll go OK next week and we'll be fine. And yet the Bible's trying to remind us all the time, listen, you are not all that you think you are, You're weak, you're defenseless. I mean, the New Testament goes so far as to say things that just are insulting. Right? You are a vapor, you're just like moisture, you're just a mist is all you are. In the Old Testament that familiar verse in Isaiah 40 that says you're like the grass of the field and the sun rises upon you, scorches you, the wind blows and you get swept away. You're like the flower, it may look good for a bit but it's very fragile and it withers and it dies. There's just not much to you when you look at all of the other things in reality. You're weak, you're defenseless, you're small.

Sometimes there are circumstances that help us kind of feel that in a new kind of renewed way. Things like earthquakes on Friday can kind of remind you that things that you think are so stable like your house or, you know, really you don't have any control over those things, you feel very small and very defenseless. You recognize the reality of a world that's filled with things that can easily hurt us. It's amazing with all those reminders in Scripture that you have on the other hand a bunch of texts that almost seem contradictory. And that is that we're constantly being called as God's people to be bold and strong and courageous. "Be strong and courageous," the Bible says, "don't be afraid." And yet in the Bible we're also told how weak and how vulnerable we are.

Well, that's a hard thing for us to think through. It's our thing to think through because we think well how in the world do we have this sense of fearlessness and no anxiety and strength and courage if we are so small and defenseless. Well, of course, the connection has to do with how we are to view ourselves in relation to strength, which is not inherent in ourselves. In other words, when people start to think that they're all that, like the Edomites there in modern-day Petra and ancient Edom, they built their homes up in the cleft of the rocks. You've seen that on Indiana Jones and maybe you've been to Petra and toured those amazing, you know, edifices that are in the wall.

Obadiah says to them, "Listen, the pride of your heart has deceived you." You think in yourself and you say in your heart, "Who will bring me down?" You have this sense of being strong and in reality when you've departed from your relationship with God, you have no strength at all. Matter of fact, you're in the most vulnerable place of all. And in other words, the only way that I can have a biblical sense, as it says in Proverbs 28:1, to be as "bold as a lion" is when I'm rightly connected and rightly related to the God who has all strength. That's the key. Matter of fact, that's the subtitle of the message this morning. In the psalm that we've chosen to look at, "the Lord is my strength." It's my strength in the sense that I have it and I experience it. I can be bold, I can be courageous, I can be fearless, but it's not because there's anything inherent in myself. That's a super important thing.



When the world wants to blaviate in its hubris and wants to, you know, continue to, with its bluster, think that they are all that. Then they start cowering, you know, in the midst of disaster, in pestilence, in storms, and wars, or "rumors of wars or earthquakes" as Christ said. Those things can rattle people and they may with a, you know, a comedic streak kind of cover it and joke their way through it, but these are things that are unsettling for people who have no foundation to be strong. Right? To them it is an illusion. Their strength is an illusion.

It was interesting thinking about the earthquake on Friday. I was thinking about the times I've been preaching when there have been earthquakes. I've been preaching long enough now and preach a lot during week to actually be preaching while earthquakes are going on here in Southern California. And that's always an effective punctuation on your sermon when you're preaching and the building starts shaking. It is helpful. So I just couldn't help myself, I thought back to one of the ones where I had the biggest shaker in any time I'd been on the platform preaching and so I went back to look at my notes because I thought I wonder exactly what I was preaching on.

It was a sermon from Jude, the one I'm thinking of, I think was the Big Bear quake on a Sunday morning many years ago. I looked through my notes to see what I was preaching. And again, I'm not making this up. This is just poetically crazy that these were the things I wrote in my notes leading up to that sermon that weekend. This was in the first point. It was one of the highlighted things in the first point in that sermon and that was "You need to see your vulnerability" OK? And then here's the exhortation in the middle of the sermon. "You need to stand firm," which I thought was interesting. And then I got around to the end of the passage, and again hopefully I choose my words a little more maturely now, but the point was about the "mega-ness" of God. I think I've got a little better over the years.

I said contemplate the mega-ness of God, the greatness of God, which wasn't the genius of the sermon but one of the passages I quoted in the notes, that I had copied in the notes, was from First Chronicles when David is setting up his son, Solomon, to build the temple and he's addressing the people and he prays to God and he says this: "God, yours..." This is a very important distinction because there's a separateness from himself. "Yours is the greatness and yours is the power, yours is the glory and the victory and the majesty." Very expressive, you know, over the top kind of language, but he's making it clear, you're the great one, you're the powerful one. "All that is in the heavens is yours, all that is in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom," the authority, the power to rule. "O Lord, you are the exalted one, your head over all. Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all things."

Now listen to this line from verse 12, "In your hand are power and might, and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength." That was a super important thing to say in that here are people who realize their smallness and Solomon would go on to say I'm building this amazing edifice in the ancient world, one of the biggest and most elaborate buildings ever built, and he says this is just nothing. Heaven is your throne, Earth is your footstool. This is nothing. And our greatest is nothing compared to you. We're vulnerable, we're small, we're weak, we're defenseless. But yours is the strength and we're relating to you and we're worshipping you and



we're connecting with you and we're reaching out to you. And it's in your hand to give power, you delegate authority and power, and certainly the kings of Israel had some power. And it's yours to give strength.

And you give strength. You can ensconce David in his throne in Jerusalem or Solomon on the throne after him with even a bigger kingdom and they can be secure but they're only secure in so far as they are connected to and relating to the strong one, the great one, the one who has all the power to give strength. I thought what an appropriate thing for us to recognize from the psalm that we've chosen to study here on the penultimate study of our Psalm series, we've got this statement about the greatness of God's strength that he gives to us. "The Lord is my strength."

So I want you to turn to Psalm 118 if you haven't already, it's printed on your worksheet. I want to look at this psalm as a great guide and an instruction template for us how do we derive that strength, a strength that's not inherent in us so that I can stand up and say, "I'm not afraid, I'm proud, I'm courageous." But I am courageous and I am fearless and I'm not going to look at the future being concerned or worried, because of my connection to this great God. If I can settle that then I can say, as verse 14 says, there's where I got the title. Right? "The Lord is my strength." The Lord is my strength.

So that's the theme. Now let's look at this. It's a long psalm as you can see, 29 verses. So let's start at the beginning here, verses 1 through 4, a word in the Hebrew text that we've seen a lot throughout our series, the word "hesed" is going to be the focus here. But let's look at the first four verses and try and see how we can get that strength that God would have us have. Not skittish, not, to quote again Proverbs 28, not "the wicked who flee when no one's pursuing," the skittishness, where an earthquake or anything else might rattle us in an emotional sense. We're not going to be rattled. They're the ones who are rattled. Right? "But the righteous are bold as a lion." So how do we get that?

Well let's start with this, verses 1 through 4. The psalmist says, "Oh give thanks to the Lord, and again you see capital O-R-D, which is our code here for the fact that this is the Hebrew word of God's proper name, Yahweh. So "give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good." OK? And here's our word: "for his steadfast love," that translates, those two words, "steadfast love," that word hesed, we've seen so much in our study this spring. Hesed. He is a God who has this tenacious, strong, faithful, enduring, loyal love, "and it endures forever." So it's almost a repetition here that is almost unnecessary. It's a faithful, strong, enduring love and it endures. That's the idea. It endures forever. OK.

And then he takes three groups, verses 2, 3 and 4, and he says, you guys should all say this. First, the whole nation. Let Israel, God's covenant people, let them say, "His hesed endures forever," his love endures forever. And then, you know, "the house of Aaron." Sunday School grads, who in the world is Aaron historically? Somebody's brother. Whose brother? Moses' brother and "his house." What is that? His family. His family was the house that was chosen, the family of the lineage, the descendants who would be the priests. So we've got the priests. So, hey, all of the nation you should say God's love is faithful, tenacious, loyal and it last forever. And obviously,



that infers the fact that God loves you. And, hey, house of Aaron, you priests, you ought to say God's hesed, his steadfast love, endures forever.

And as matter of fact, we can look even beyond the borders of Israel if we want, anyone from another nation... We were reading our Daily Bible Reading and the book of Acts about Cornelius out there in Italy and here is a man who fears God. He recognizes that there is only one true God and it's not found in the pagan temples of Rome. He realizes this is the real God, the real God who makes heaven and earth and the God of Israel. And so it doesn't matter where you are, you fear the Lord. Right? You ought to say, God's steadfast love endures forever. God loves his covenant people. God loves the priests who draw near to him in a special mediatorial relationship in the Old Testament. Hey, and anyone who fears Lord, you ought to say, God's love is amazing, it endures forever, it's tenacious, it's loyal, it's set on you in a special way.

You know, if there's one thing that should be affecting your disposition in life, it ought to be the fact that you are loved by God. If you're taking notes and I hope that you would this morning, jot this one down, number one, you need to "Be Secure," that's the goal here because, everyone's got a reason, "Because God Loves You," God's love has been set upon you. Before you write that, yawn, lean back and go, "Yawn, I was are you expecting to hear that in church today." Listen, I'm not talking about the fact that Jesus loves you, God loves you, like the butterflies and kittens and rainbows on Twitter. Right? I'm not talking about that. Everyone likes to talk about God's love, like, our picture's on his refrigerator and he has nice warm feelings toward you, and, you know, he just loves you and wants to send you a kitten in a box in the mail or something. That was really weird, it just came out. But, that is not what I'm talking about. It's not what I'm talking about.

The love, hesed, that God gives his covenant people, that he shows toward his priests that allows them to enter into his presence, symbolically in the temple or the Tabernacle before that. The people who will fear God, who knows the consuming fire and a holy God and a holy judge and they draw near to him and they realize that God loves me. I'm talking about him setting, like Moses said in Deuteronomy, he's set his love on you. Not because you were the greatest of all people, not because you're more numerous than the other clans of the world, but because he just chose to keep a promise and set his love on you. That's a disposition of God. That's a disposition of God saying I want to do you good. I see you as a focus and a target of my goodness. That's what I'm talking about.

Now, does God love everyone? Well, yes, of course. In a sense he loves everyone. Why? Because the people of this earth experience, as Jesus said, the sun rising on their fields and the rain falling on their crops. And he's good to both the just and the unjust, the evil and the good. That's an expression of goodness. God is expressing his goodness to people. And in that sense God loves everyone. But you do know that God separates his people who he sees in grace and the people he does not see that way who just are the rebels and sinners and transgressors that they are, and his feeling towards them, if you want to use a feeling word, is, as we read in the psalms, hatred. OK? What?

Can you love and hate at the same time? Yes, because we're not talking about an emotional word when I talk about love. I'm talking about a purposeful verb. A verb that says I am setting my favor



to do good to you. Is God good to his "enemies?" Well, of course he is. He lets his sun rise on their lives. He lets them enjoy the digestion of food today. He lets them enjoy family and an income and cars and houses and homes and breath, fresh air. God is a good God, gives good things to everyone, in different proportions I realize, but that's an act of his love.

How does he feel about the rebel? Right? Here's the psalm: "God's soul hates the wicked." He's not real happy about them. But here's the thing about us. He's changed his disposition toward us in that he has seen us in grace, more on that in a minute, but he's allowed us to be favored in a way that the rest of the world is not. Now, I say we, we, we, we, we, not because I'm French, but because I want you to know that this is something that we are if you are one of mine. That means that you're part of my group, which is not Mike Fabarez's group or Compass' group, but part of the group that I belong to. That's the adopted people of God.

The covenant people, now we recognize in the Church age, is the Church, people who fall under the umbrella of God's grace, who have clung to the cross, and by that I mean we see that we have a sin problem, we recognize that sin problem and we say we need mercy and grace. We deserve justice and punishment, but we're going to pray for your forgiveness. We can see that all my sin can be laid, because of the equation that you've laid out for me, can be laid on the cross. Christ can suffer and absorb the penalty that I deserve. And that's called repentance and faith. I'm turning from my sins, seeing the problem that it is, and I'm trusting in Christ to solve the problem for me.

Therefore, I can say now I'm accepted, I have access to God. It's like I'm of the house of Aaron, because in the Old Testament you had to be at the house of Aaron to even get into the courtyard or into the Tabernacle or the temple or certainly in the holy of holies you had to be the high priest and only go in there once a year. But we're like priests. Matter of fact, the New Testament doctrine is the "priesthood of all believers." And that's simply saying that in the New Testament there is no mediatorial work, there's no group of people who say let me represent you before God. We all stand before God through the mediatorial work of one person, the Great High Priest Jesus Christ.

You have full access, full relationship because God has fully accepted you. And that's not the way he views your neighbor. He doesn't view your friends that way at work. He only views the people who have repented of their sins and put their trust in Christ as his covenant people, as people who have full access to him. And our right response to that should be, verse 4, we should fear and respect and honor and be in awe of that God who, though he should cast us out into outer darkness, embraces us as his own adopted children. And I would want to ask you this morning, are you sure you were in the love of God? Are you sure? You may feel loved by God because, you know, who doesn't want to feel loved by God. You may say look at all these good things that I have, I'm sure I'm good with God. God continues to say, we read in our Daily Bible Reading this morning, we saw a reflection of it in Romans Chapter 2 verse 4, which is that all of those good gifts, all of that kindness, is to lead you to see your sin and lead you to repentance. If you repent of your sins and put your trust in Christ you step into this family, you have full access to God. You fear him because, though he is your Father, you call on one who impartially judges each man's work and you live your life in fear before this God. And that's the relationship that you can then



say, "I am loved by God." How loved am I? Jesus said in John 6, "All the Father gives to me will come to me, and those who come to me I will never cast out." I'm now in a permanent, firm, fixed relationship.

Oh, I know it's familiar territory, but turn real quickly, as though we had time for this, turn real quickly to Romans Chapter 8. Romans Chapter 8. Go to the bottom of this passage. Remember these great truths. A God who should reject us has sent his Son to embrace us so that you can sit here knowing that the liar and the cheat and all that you are is never going to be seen as a barrier between you and God. That all of it is appended to the cross of Christ and that you know that I am loved by God and nothing can change that.

Take a look at this great text, Romans Chapter 8. Look at verse 31, drop all the way down there. He said some great things. Matter of fact, we should look back up, verse 30, "I've been predestined." God has chosen to set his love on me. "I've been called." In real life I can see that calling in my life and being drawn to him. Well, then "those he's called he's justified," God has declared me righteous. And if he's justified me then he's going to glorify me. One day I'll be in his presence. "What am I going to say to these things," verse 31? "If God is for us," if he's done all that for us, "who can be against us?" And we're thinking, as I say every time I read this, many people can. But, the one who matters is the God who can condemn me. If the one who can condemn me didn't spare his own Son, verse 32, 'but he gave him up,' made him suffer, made him absorb the penalty that I deserve, "he gave him up for us all, well then how is he not also going to graciously give us all things?".

I mean, talk about being a favorite child. "Who's going to bring a charge against God's elect?" Well, God could but it's him who justifies, "it is God who justifies. Who's going to condemn?" Well, I guess Jesus because he even lived in a human body, he could certainly condemn us because he knows all the temptations of humanity. He could say these guys should have done better, they should have done right. It's true, he could condemn. "But Christ Jesus, the one who died," he came and took our place like a lamb led to the slaughter. "More than that he was raised from the dead," so I know that God has accepted this sacrifice, "who is at the right hand of God." Talk about the one who should be the judge, jury and executioner of our lives, he now has gotten out of the judge's tribunal, stepped down and become our attorney. Right? He's now "interceding for us." He's now pleading the case for us.

Now "who's going to separate us from that kind of love?" When God's disposition has gone from judge, jury and executioner to "I'm going to be your advocate" who's going to separate it? I mean that is an irreversible decision, as the Bible says, he's given us over from the Father to the Son and the Son is not going to cast us out. I don't care how bad your tribulation is, I don't care about distresses, your persecution, I don't care if you don't have any food, I don't care if you don't have any clothes, I don't care if there's danger or sword. And just like the Bible says, being a Christian and following Christ, being a person of God, you're always going to have a lot more trouble in this life "for your sake we're being killed all the day long. We're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

Well, even in all that knowing all these things, who's going to separate us? No one's going to separate us. "In all these things we're more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I'm



sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus." Nothing can separate us from that kind of love. Do you want security?

That's the ultimate expression of security. Insecurity is tied up in the word I used to hear as a kid, "Hey kid, you're skating on thin ice." Remember that line? Growing up in Long Beach I never did any skating on ice, let alone thin ice, but I knew what it meant. And I felt like, "If you do one more thing, man, you're in big trouble. You do two more things, you're out of the family." Right? I mean, that's what I felt. "You're in big, big trouble, mister." Well see, here's the thing, we are in big, big trouble before the holy tribunal of a just, an absolutely perfect God. And yet that God, who should cast us away, has become our solution, our advocate.

And that's the kind of love where you're not standing on thin ice wondering if you're going to bust through the bottom of it and fall into the frigid waters. This is, as I often say, it's like you standing on the deck of a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier with 50,000 tons of aluminum and steel plating. It's just not going anywhere. It's like those M1 Abrams tanks that you might have seen on the 4th. Those huge tanks, take your shotgun out and shoot one and see what happens. Nothing. Better have your goggles on, right? It's all going to bounce right back at you. You're not going to penetrate that. I mean, that is the most secure thing you can have and then to add on top of that that God says, "Listen, anyone who comes to me I will not cast them out." The problem is that most people assume they've come to him when in fact they have not. It's going to be a horrifying reality for us a thousand years from now to look around and see who's not with us, because people thought going to church makes you a recipient of that kind of covenant love. They think that being a part of a small group or singing a song or feeling a feeling or looking around and seeing gifts of God and God has been good to me, surely God likes me.

"The soul of the Lord hates the wicked." "How do I go from being that target of God's wrath to being an adopted child of God?" I've said it. You come to a place of seeing your sin for what it is and turning to Christ in genuine, penitent faith. And once you're there, man, there's no better place to be. There's nothing that can change that, there's nothing that can separate you from that kind of love. You want to talk about something that should make you courageous in the midst of a changing and tumultuous world? I'm loved. A lot of people feel like they're not love. You're love. God has demonstrated his love toward you in the most profound way. The one who has the most reason to hate you has decided to bring you into his family and set his love on you. All the covenant people of God should say that's crazy. Steadfast love, it endures forever. The priests who draw near to him should say that, those who fear the Lord around the world should say that.

And then verses 5 through 13. He gets back into very familiar territory and goes I know one reason God loves me. I've seen it. I've seen it play out in space and time in real life. "I've had distress," and I've prayed, "I've called out to Yahweh and Yahweh has answered me and set me free." I know this: looking at the history of God answering prayers in my life, as I said last week not every prayer you've ever prayed, certainly things don't go the way we want all the time, but God has been help to you. And this psalmist can say, "Yahweh is on my side; I will not fear." That's



what it's going to do to my disposition currently. I'm not going to be afraid. "What can man do to me?" Well, they can do a lot, but in the end it doesn't matter. Ultimately God is on my side.

Verse 7, "Yahweh is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me." And there are plenty who hate you, I mean, in particular. You've got an entire angelic fallen class of beings who hate you. They come to steal and kill and destroy. That's the reality. But in reality, "I'm going to look in triumph over those." As a matter of fact, I'm going to take refuge in Yahweh and "it's better to trust in Yahweh than to trust in man. It's better to take refuge in Yahweh," verse 9, "than to trust in princes," even very powerful people here on this planet. And he looks back and he thinks of this, verse 10, "All the nations surrounded me," but look at how God helped me defeat them, "in the name of Yahweh I cut them off."

Verse 11, "They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side." I mean, it looked like I was down and out for sure. "But in the name of Yahweh," I trusted in him, "I cut them off." Verse 12, look at this vivid picture. "They surrounded me like bees; and they went out like a fire among thorns." What does that look like? We'll throw your tumbleweed into a firepit, set it on fire. It's not going to warm you for very long. It'll be gone, it'll go out. And that's what they were like. All their bluster, all their strength, all their military force, the psalmist says "they went out like fire among thorns; in the name of Yahweh I cut them off!" Here's the summary, verse 13. "I was pushed hard, so that I was falling." I certainly wasn't exempt from the trouble, "but Yahweh," here it is again, "helped me."

Here's the reality. If you want to think about an expression of God's love, and I've tried to emphasize this over and over and over again in this series, you've got to take note and chronicle the answers to prayer. If you're not keeping track of that we've got a problem. We've got to remember how God has helped us. Number two on your outline, you want to build courage in your life, fearlessness? "Be Courageous Because God Helps You." God helps you. He helps you because he says, "I'm with you, I will never leave you, I will never forsake you, I'll walk you through this." Does that mean you win every battle in life? Of course not.

Think back to the one that probably, as I use those words, if you're a Sunday school graduate, you remember the line, "Be strong and courageous." Who does God say that to in the most memorable scene? Who? Joshua. Joshua Chapter 1, Joshua is in the shadow of a great leader, Moses. I mean you don't want to follow that pastor, let me just tell you that. Right? You step into the leadership in that situation, wow Moses, the guy whose face was glowing because he was hanging out with God, you're going to take that role? He does and God looks at him and says, "Don't be afraid. Be strong and courageous." Here's the reason. "Because I'm with you." To do what? "To help you. I'm with you. I'm not going to leave you."

Did he have success in everything? Well, no. There's a city called Ai that they got defeated at right out of the gate. They fell on their faces and Joshua is found on his face before God pleading with God and, of course, God says, "get up off your face." Why? "Because you got problems and the problems are that you're not keeping my commandments." In the passage, let me just read it for you. Joshua Chapter 1. He says, listen, don't be afraid. Don't fear. "Be strong and courageous." He says, "Just be careful to do what I say, careful to do all that's in the law, just like Moses my





servant commanded you. Do what he says. Don't deviate from the right or the left, then you're going to have success.

This Book of the Law, don't let it depart from your mouth, meditate on it day and night, be careful to do all that is written in it." He says it's going to be great. It'll be fine. "You'll prosper, you'll do good. Have I not commanded you? Be strong, be courageous. Don't be frightened, don't be dismayed, the Lord is with you wherever you go." The expression of God's love is his presence in your life and his presence in your life is manifested by the help that he has given you. I think you've all got a story to tell about how God has helped you. Am my right? He's helped you, even when you had cancer, even when you had problems, even when there were struggles, even when there were financial issues, even when there's a loss, even when there's unexpected, crushing news to you.

Has not God helped you? Then you ought to be able to say, as he says, look at this great line, verse 6, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear." I'm not going to be afraid. Jeremiah was afraid - he thought he was too young. God says, "Don't be afraid. I am with you." Moses is afraid, even at the beginning of his ministry. He stammered, he couldn't speak clearly. "Don't worry Moses, I will be with you." Gideon was afraid. Midian was there just trouncing the people. And he took the smallest guy from the smallest clan, and God says, "Don't worry. Don't be afraid. I will be with you." Jacob, the momma's boy. I'd rather go to war with Esau. Right? And yet he says, "Don't worry Jacob. I will be with you." Solomon, inexperienced, got to build this temple. His dad was an amazing fighting commander. He said, "Don't worry Solomon. I am with you."

Peter was stumbling in his own sin feeling bad about himself. Christ shows up. Reminds him of the last thing Jesus said there on the mountain. He says, "I will be with you always even to the end of the age. Don't forget. Do you love me? I love you. That's the implication. I am not leaving you. Get out there and feed my sheep."

Be courageous. God is not going to depart. I think I brought this up not long ago, but when I say the word Ebenezer I know you might think of Scrooge and Dickens and Christmas time. But remember what that word means. Ebenezer. "Eben" in Hebrew is the word stone and "ezer" is to help. Ebenezer to remind you with this monument of stones that God has helped you. Then Samuel says, "The Lord has helped us thus far." In other words, look at the future with courage because the Lord has helped us. That was after a battle and it was a victory there and you think, well that's the story, you said that a couple of weeks ago. Well, I did but maybe I didn't remind you that that was the name that he chose from a city where Israel, like five chapters earlier, four chapters earlier, had been greatly defeated.

So here was the thing, much like Ai. Ai was a city where Joshua and his troops were defeated and God had to say, "Listen, just get up. I'm going to be with you. Get back there and realize that though you're grieving over this failure can you recognize how I'd been with you. Do not be afraid." Ebenezer was a city, look it up in your Bible dictionaries, you'll see the city of a great defeat, the first entry in your Bible dictionaries will be "where they lost that huge battle at Ebenezer." And then the second reference is going to be there in First Samuel 7 where then Samuel says, "Listen," a very wise move, "I'm going to build a monument here. I'm going to call it

Ebenezer and I want you to think of what it means. It means a monument where God has helped us. It's commemorating the help that God is." Look past the failure, look past the deprivation, look past the unanswered prayer and look at how God has been with you.

I think God has proved it in the past. Hebrews 13. I think that's on your worksheet for your small groups, if you have one this week. I mean, memorize that passage, meditate on it. "I will never leave you or forsake you." And in that passage he talks about then you should not be freaking out about your money, that's the context there. And it quotes this passage, Psalm 118, I'm not going to be afraid of what man can do to you. I'm not going to be afraid what's going to happen with war or pestilence or earthquakes or anything else. I'm not going to be afraid. Because everything I've got to walk through, the Lord is going to walk through that with me. Be courageous. God has helped you in the past. He will continue to help you.

Verses 14 through 18. There's something else here clearly that has added to this strength that I'm already building in the passage. God loves me. Oh, that's assuring. God helps me. You're right. I should be more courageous about life in that regard. And now he says, "The Lord is my strength and my," he adds a layer, "song; he's become my salvation." I've seen him save me and that certainly refers to verses 5 through 13. Look at how God has allowed me to cut off the enemy in these battles. Now we revisit that new layer - "glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous." Well, they're out on a camping trip. Yeah. Here's the thing. The tents in the Old Testament, I mean, unless we're in the patriarchal period where they're nomads in the land, I mean, you should be living in houses, houses made of stone and wood and you've got carpenters putting these things together.

So we're talking about people who are out there camping. They're in a situation usually where they're camping for warfare and they're recognizing this as they sit around thinking about the battle that they're about to fight. You know what? I can sing glad songs. I can look at this battle with a kind of gladness because I know God has proven himself in the past. And I realized this: when it comes to the battles that I fight, look at the middle of verse 15, ultimately I see that God is the one fighting through us. God is fighting for us. "The right hand," that's the hand you grab the sword with, "the right hand of Yahweh, it does valiantly." Now that's a strange statement. Think about it. The right hand of the Lord has done valiantly. What's that mean? Bravely, courageously. God has been courageous. God has been brave. God has shown valor in warfare.

He repeats it, verse 16, "The right hand of Yahweh exalts. It's like he's picking up the sword. "The right hand of Yahweh does valiantly! I shall not die." Why? Because you got a good fighter on your side if the God of the Bible is your fighter. "I shall not die, I shall live, and I'll recount the deeds of the Lord." This is building on recalling God's help in the past. I'm confident. Now, I may have gone through some hard times and some of that hard time may be caused by my own sin, as it was at Ai for Joshua. "The Lord has disciplined me severely." He might have had some setbacks and lost some battles. "But he has not given me over to death."

Now here's the thing. It may be, as some commentators suggest, because we have no background on this psalm, that this psalm was written after the Babylonian captivity. That it was written in celebration of the reconstitution of Israel, particularly Jerusalem, as Ezra came back to lay the



foundation and rebuild the temple, and Nehemiah came back to rebuild the walls. The section we're about to get into, verses 19 through 29, it certainly reflects a kind of coming into the city in a victorious way. Well maybe this is the case. If it is the case we can look past just God helped me through a battle, with the reality that God has helped this nation. They went off to Babylon. You remember why? Because they had sinned badly, they became idolaters and God said, off to Babylon you go, for how many years Sunday school grads? That's a long time, 70 years.

So 70 years they've hung their harps on the willows across the river in Babylon and they're really feeling bad that they're in the doghouse with God and God is not happy with them. And yet they come back. I mean, perhaps that's the reference here. Maybe that sense of nationally they've been disciplined greatly, severely, and yet God hadn't given up on them. All those exilic prophets, particularly Daniel and Ezekiel, keep focusing on the fact God's not done with you yet. God's not done. You've had some hard times. God is going to help you. God is going to fight for you.

As a matter of fact, God has fought for you already. As Nehemiah, the cup-bearer, stands before the king, I mean, he sits there and prays as he's asked the question about why he's crying and feeling bad in front of the king. And the Lord fights for him. And Cyrus writes a reconstituted commitment and declaration to rebuild the temple. You see it rebuilt even against the enemies and the critics, like Sanballat and Tobiah, in 52 days. The Lord has fought for them. All that, if you look at verse 14 again, you could say look at how God has saved, here's a good outlook, a fantastically happy outlook, joyful songs, glad songs, even in the midst of some difficulties because they realize this: God is fighting for them and has fought for them and will fight for them.

But we're still stuck in some historic things that don't seem like eternal issues of life and death. Now, I don't want to play fast and loose with the text because I realized the immediate interpretation has to do with either individual deliverance or national deliverance, but there's something much bigger than either one of those. It's the kind of salvation we mean when we use the word salvation in church these days. We're not talking about winning a battle at the boardroom or in our company or in our family or even in our nation. We're talking about winning the battle that really we all are going to face the day we die. Standing before our maker.

You know that old line, "Get ready to meet your maker?" That's the real battle that you face. The Bible says, here it is, the law of sin and death is your problem because you, just like me, are a sinner. The problem is when you stand before a holy God you're in big trouble, mister. That's the problem. The Bible says in Colossians all of those sins that you've committed, every one of them you've committed this week, they all stand hostile against you and should condemn you. But thanks be to God that the law of sin and death, as Paul put it in Romans, has been replaced by the law of the spirit and life. God has sent his Son and he's drawn us by his Spirit into relationship with his Son, so that all the sins that should condemn me now no longer condemn me, but God can look at me and say, "you're blessed, you're forgiven, you're in my family. My love is on you. I'm not only your helper in life. I've now become your salvation in eternity. And I fought the battle for you."



What's the battle he fought? He came on earth, he lived in human form, he fought all the temptations starting in Matthew Chapter 4. The temptation when Satan himself came against him in the desert, he fought every temptation, lived the perfect life I should have lived, and then died on the cross and absorbed all of what the Father poured out on him as though he were me. Talk about fighting a valiant fight. You want to talk about our ultimate valor that we exalt in the Triune God, it's that God has worked salvation for us, by his right hand he's work salvation for us. And in his hand, of course, is his Son and he's the ultimate fighter, the victor who's won and that should be the theme of our songs. If you want to talk about salvation, the real salvation we should ultimately be concern about looks beyond any temporal thing that God could ever deliver us from. It's the fact that you and I don't have to face the condemnation that our sin deserves. That ought to make you glad.

Number three on your outline, "Be Joyful Because God Has Fought For You." The ultimate fight I'm concerned with as I move toward the end of this psalm is that you and I recognize that we have had our salvation secured by the ultimate warrior, God himself. If you want a picture of that, go back to the beginning of the Bible and think about the exodus out of Egypt. They were enslaved in Egypt. And what happens? God sends a deliver, Moses, whose certainly is this picture and type of Christ. He goes in and leads the people out and through a mighty powerful hand with a rod in his hand he sits there and breaks the powerful yoke of a pharaoh and frees his people.

And then we have musicians - hey, you like music? The first song ever recorded in the Bible, Moses sings the song and Miriam sings the song. And it's not a song you probably would write if you were kind of offering your first work of composition to a Christian music company. Right? Probably not that song you would write because it's all about God being a fighter, going to war. Matter of fact, here's the line. "The Lord is a man of war." Think about that. Probably not going to fly with most, you know, worship companies these days. That's how music in the Bible starts. The first recorded lyrics we have is about the Lord being a man of war. Horse and rider, he has thrown into the sea, Pharaoh's mighty army thrown in the sea. The Lord has fought for us.

"Well, I'm glad that things got better with the music in the Bible." Listen, go to the end of the Bible. Here's a little fun trivia for you music lovers, and find the lyrics of the last song in the Bible. Guess what they're doing? They're singing the same song. Matter of fact, they said in heaven they sang the song of Moses and it quotes the song of God being the fighter who's redeemed his people. We're much like in a battle, they're throwing up their arms and going, he's delivered us, he's fought for us.

I don't read books like this very often but I couldn't help but read the biography of Jessica Buchanan. She was taken hostage by the Somalis, a horrendous kidnapping. She was there for three months and she was abused and it was horrible. And you can read about all of her experience in that and her fear and kept in the dark and chained up and all the things they were doing to her. And the story ends by the Navy sending in SEAL Team Six to rescue her. Twenty-four guys get dropped in on the chopper's predawn raid. They go and kill nine of her kidnapers and they put her on the chopper and 24 plus 1 get lifted out there and fly her to safety.



Now there's a lot of things that she wants. She wants a cheeseburger. Right? She would like a blanket. She'd love a Coke. I don't know. There were probably a lot of things she could complain about at that point. But guess what Jessica was not doing on her flight to freedom. She wasn't complaining. Matter of fact, she was intensely joyful as she gripped the arm of those SEAL members in gratitude for her deliverance. The Bible says, and it's such a great picture of redemption, in Hebrews Chapter 2, it says, "Since the children share in flesh and blood, he himself partook likewise in the same things, that he might through death destroy the one who has the power of death." I mean that's Christ. He looked at the enslavement that we have and he came in and penetrated time and space, the second person of the Godhead came in as a warrior, a man of valor and he bravely fought the devil and he won. And I say that because that's what the next line says, "He came to destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and to deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery." That's redemption.

Do you want to sing about the ultimate salvation? You want to sing about it even when you're in the tents out in the fields fighting the skirmish of the week and the month and the year? Sing the songs of the fact that you've been delivered. Sing the song of a warrior who has fought for your salvation. "The right hand of Yahweh has done valiantly. The right hand of Yahweh is exalted and has done valiantly. I'm not going to die. I'm alive," I've been redeemed. Oh, I've been disciplined severely. Maybe I'm in a Somali prison camp because of my own stupidity. But you know what? I'm being airlifted out and he has not given me over, he hasn't left me to die out here in the desert.

You may sit here because a lot of the theme this spring and summer has been in being joyful and glad. You may sit there just impenetrable to that message. You're not joyful and glad about your salvation. If you're not joyful and glad about your salvation then you don't understand what's at stake. You don't understand the terms. It reminds me a lot of what people deal with in the modern psychology of things that happen when hostages are taken, speaking of Jessica. I think of the bank in the 70s in Sweden. The bank robber came in and with his guns he took four bank employees hostage. And there's a standoff for days, they went days in this standoff, and what was strange and would become a well-known case because all four of those prisoners start to slowly turn to become advocates for their captor. And they actually start to argue with the police as the police go and try and negotiate with the captor. They start becoming advocates for their captor who comes in with a gun to kill them you understand. And only keeps them alive because he's trying to get out alive.

I say it happened in Sweden, it was in the capital of Sweden, it was in Stockholm, a big bank on the corner in downtown. And maybe you know the phrase, it's called the Stockholm Syndrome. Have you've heard of that? It's when the captives start becoming allies with the one who's taken them captive. They don't realize what a bad situation they're in and certainly non-Christians are that way. Am I right? I mean non-Christian don't get it. I mean the one who comes to kill, steal and destroy and keep them from the source of life and all good things, he's now made them captive. He is the one that is the reason they should be afraid. He is out to destroy them and they're there parroting his stuff. The Father of Lies, think about it, in our day. And all they're doing is campaigning for the one who hates them.



Talk about the spiritual Stockholm syndrome. That's it. And even when we rush in with the King of kings to be their redeemer and say, "Listen, here comes this SEAL Team Six on steroids, it's Christ with his right hand to save you," they don't want any part of it. I'm going to stick around with my hostage-taker here. That's exactly what happens in the psychology, sometimes, of these folks turning to be the advocates of the one who wants to hurt them. And some of us share a little bit of that, even as Christians. We don't see the big deal. It is a big deal.

On the day that the Lake of Fire becomes a reality and people's lives now are starting to physically suffer in resurrected eternal bodies because there is the resurrection of the just and the unjust, and you see how horrible it is that Satan kept trying to get advocates to side with him against the redemption that's in Christ. They're calling Jesus narrow-minded and foolish and the strictures of morals and all the things they hate about us as Christians. The narrow mindedness of all of that. The bigotry of Christianity they call it. You're going to realize what a huge rip-off this is. You look back and I bet you'll regret this, that I wasn't more joyful and happy in the tents of the righteous. I didn't fill those with glad songs like I should have. You and I ought to be joyful.

As Nehemiah and Ezra told the people who were gathered there after being in the doghouse for 70 years coming out of the exile, listen, you need to make sure that you make the joy of the Lord your strength. There's something invigorating about rejoicing in your redemption. That strengthens you. You ought to rejoice in the fact that you've been delivered. That Christ has come in and penetrated the camp, the death camp, and has plucked us out of it.

Nehemiah had a lot of people grieving over all that happened. They kept looking back in the rearview mirror, "Look at how we got here, look at how bad it was, it was horrible." And Ezra stood up in Nehemiah 8 and he says, "Stop it. No grieving, no mourning, no crying. Stop with all that." He says focus on what God has just done. This is a day of rejoicing. We're going to feast. We're going to have food. We're going to give gifts to each other and we are going to rejoice because the joy of the Lord is our strength. Remember that line? That comes at a time when they're not seeing the value of their redemption. Look at how the Lord has fought for you. Look at how we got here. Look at Artaxerxes' and Cyrus' decree. Look at that, we just built this wall in 52 days. Look at the temple being reconstructed. Look at what God has done for us. Be joyful because God fought for you. Oh, I know he's here to help you, but the real battle is to get you not to pay the penalty of your sins.

And in verse 19 we're no longer talking about tents. I guess we're done with the battle here in verse 19. "Opened to me," look at it, "the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of Yahweh; and the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you've answered me and become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that Yahweh has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we pray, O Yahweh! O Yahweh, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh. We bless you from the house of Yahweh. Yahweh is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us. Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar! You are my God, I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for he is good." It ends the way it starts, "for his steadfast love endures forever."



Well, that's a mouthful, verses 19 through 29. What gates are we talking about? Well, this is one of the reasons a lot of people think maybe this is Nehemiah's gates. I mean, Nehemiah has built this set of walls, there are gates on it, and maybe we're done being in the tents out there in the exile, we're coming into our new home. Some people say maybe this is a psalm that was written for the pilgrimage feasts. Maybe the people were coming up singing this song and it was written as they come back for the Passover, the tabernacles or feast of booths, and they come in and they visit Jerusalem, they walk through those gates.

But this is bigger than that. It's clearly about the king, it's about the Lord fighting valiantly. It's a song that we know was sung the day that Jesus came through the gates. Look at verse 26 again, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh. We bless you from the house of Yahweh." So this looks like some kind of processional into the Temple Mount, not just through the gates of the city, but the gates of the Temple Mount. The east gate, it's all one, by the way. So maybe that's it. Well that east gate, by the way, is where Jesus did come on Palm Sunday. And I guess we're going to look at it from our New Testament perspective, Christ did come and present himself there and he came as a victor, it seemed, as they all shouted these words from Psalm 118, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Those gates were open for him.

But what happened? Well we've recounted this a few times lately. Christ comes and presents himself in the Temple Mount and what do they do? They schemed all week as to how to kill him. Then they took him outside the gates and they crucified him. What was that all about? Well, it's about what the prophet said, "You will be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." "You will be a sacrifice that's bound," and he certainly was bound, "and you will be killed, and the Lord will look on it and be satisfied. And you will justify many and you'll intercede for many." The festival sacrifice. And at the feast, the festival sacrifice, the lamb at Passover was sacrificed but the Passover lamb being sacrificed in the Temple Mount was not the lamb that really God was concerned with, it was the lamb outside the gates that was being crucified on a cross and bound to a Roman execution rack.

Jesus came through the gates of Jerusalem and presented himself as king so he could be rejected and bound as a sacrifice on a cross. So that, by the way, you could one day, just like these soldiers, march through from your tent as a nomad in this land, traveling in this land, this foreign land, so that you could come to your eternal home. Put it this way, Jesus came through the gates of the old city of Jerusalem, 2,000 years ago, so that one day you could come through the gates of the New Jerusalem, because all your sin has been paid for by the blood of the festival sacrifice. You can come in knowing you're loved by God, you've been helped by God, you've been saved because of the valiant warrior Jesus Christ who secured your forgiveness.

Now you can enter in and that's all going to happen when Christ comes back. That's your ultimate hope. I don't care what's going on in your life today, I don't care how much sacrifice, deprivation you've had, you can say this: I know because of where I'm headed it changes everything about my disposition now. You want to talk about something I can be confident in, assured of, joyful and courageous about, it's my future, because when Christ appears I'm going to be like him. I'm going to be ushered into a place, as Jesus put it, he said, "Come you, blessed of my



Father. Enter into the kingdom, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Number four on your outline you and I ought to be courageous. We ought to "Be Courageous Because Christ is Coming." And guess what? When he comes in his glory you're going to be glorified. If you're a Christian, that's going to happen to you. No crying, no pain, no mourning, no tears. You're either going to hear from him, "Depart from me, I never knew you." And he's going to say, "Away from me, you accursed ones into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." I'm just quoting the Bible now. I'm not trying to be a bible-thumper. Well, I guess I am. Let me thump that verse on you again. "Depart from me you accursed ones into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels," and now it's also going to be your home.

Or he's going to say this: "Come you," come on in, "blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." I get to enter in through the gates when Christ comes back. Such a good picture. Let me read a couple of passages from the end of the book. Revelation 22 verse 14. "Blessed are those who wash their robes." By the way, in the book of Revelation, how do you wash your robes? You wash it in the finished work of the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to eat of the tree of life and they may enter the city through the gates." There's the picture. I'm going to enter the gates one day.

Look again if you still have the passage open, verse 27. The Lord God, "Yahweh is God, he's made his light to shine upon us." In that same scene in the eternal state, the New Jerusalem, it says this: "The city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb," the one that was slain, the festival sacrifice. "And by its light the nations will walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into this new Jerusalem and its gates will never be shut by day -- and there will be no night." So the gates are never going to shut and all the righteous are going to enter in through the gates. "Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through it." That may have been a poetic scene in the mind of the psalmist, but I'll tell you what, the eternal fulfillment of that passage is the day Christ returns and you get to walk into the kingdom.

If that's true of your future and you recognize what he's done for you in your past, and you can see that with deliverance you should have songs of joy because he's taken all of your sins and remove them from you "as far as the east is from the west." There's no need for you to be shaken ever in this life. You may be physically shaken but should never be emotionally shaken. I'm sorry, I don't mean to make you feel anxious for having anxiety but it's time for Christians to realize there's no room for that. You've got to say this: "The Lord is my helper I will not be afraid. God's love has been set upon me. He will not cast me out. The Lord has fought for me. I'm no longer under the condemnation of my sin. And one day Christ is coming and I'm going to walk through the gates and the shining favor of God is going to rest upon me and the gates are going to be open for me."

Psalms 112:6, I quote it all the time, it's one of my favorites. "For the righteous will never be moved; they'll be remembered forever." God's got his focus on me, his love on me. "They will not





be afraid of bad news; their heart is firm, trusting in the Lord. Their heart is steady; it will not be afraid." I hope that's true of you. While the world tries to joke off the insecurity and the vulnerability and the weakness and the defenseless in their bluster and their comedy and their hubris and their bloviating, I hope you can stand back and say this: while they try to cover their anxiety we are not afraid. "The righteous, they're as bold as a lion."

Time for us to be courageous, strong and courageous. Careful, circumspect, thoughtful about walking before the Lord. Yes, I understand that. There's some discomfort there in that. The one we call on, Father, he's our judge. Well, I get that. Our judge in the sense of the county fair, the chili cook-off, we're going to be evaluated, not in the sense of the judge who cast us into condemnation. Let that Lord be your strength today. Be secure, be courageous, be joyful, be confident. Those are words that are in short supply. A lot of people try to go in the self-help section of the bookstore to find that kind of help, but they're not going to find it with the world's philosophy. They're going to find it in a relationship with God. I hope you have one.

Let's pray. God, if some people don't have one I pray today would be the day that you might give them the kind of heart that's responsive to the preaching of your Word. They might see their sin for what it is, confess it forthrightly before you, even now in this prayer, and cling to the cross. By that I mean that they say that everything they deserve, it's all been absorbed by Christ. That you could forgive them and you will forgive them. Today they can face their future, their week, their health, their finances, their relationships, the pain, whatever it might be because you love them and you're their helper, you've secured their salvation because you've fought the good fight. And now God, it's left to us to trust you and not be afraid. So let us draw near to you this week. Let it show in our disposition. Let us celebrate these eternal truths no matter what happens in the circumstances of our lives.

In Jesus name. Amen