



Israel's Greatest Hits Continued-Part 2

Our Strong God

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Well, if you think back to August the 14th, 1945, you might remember that the streets throughout the United States erupted in jubilation. It was, of course, an historic day when we had the dramatic end of World War II with the signing of an unconditional surrender by the Japanese in the Pacific theater. And it was a huge relief. People were dancing in the streets it was such a monumental day after all that this nation had been through. And you might think of the war in different places and figure the pressure was there. But even right here in Southern California there was a lot of angst regarding what was going on in our world. So much happened after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. We had Japanese submarine attacks actually off the coast here of Southern California because Southern California was a huge hub of production for the war. There were countless stories of sabotage in all the industries here that were aiding in the war effort. You even had something if you look it up called the Battle of Los Angeles. Now you think I don't remember the Battle of Los Angeles. It didn't actually take place but people thought it was taking place in 1942 when we saw some unidentified something flying toward our coast and we scrambled airplanes. There was anti-aircraft artillery being shot from Southern California up into the sky to take these, what they thought were hostile airplanes coming onto our coast. We had a blackout at two in the morning. Sirens went off all over Southern California. People were supposed to shut down all the lights so it would be harder for the attacking enemies to see our cities. I mean, right here in Southern California there was a lot of anxiety, a lot of worry.

And then on August the 14th, 1945, the news came out from our president that this was all over. And you can imagine the relief that you would have to feel thinking that you're under threat and going through all these drills to take cover and to think about being bombed in our streets. It was rough. And then all of a sudden it was great. It was like how refreshing to not be under that horrific pressure. Now there are a lot of things we go through in our lives when we are not, perhaps, under the kind of trial that our country was at that particular time. But in some circumstances of our life God brings us relief. And there is that sense of relief. And yet there have been people in the Bible, of course, who we read about all the time who are under a very same kind of threat, a threat of war and then maybe they're actually engaged in bloody warfare. But then it's over and we see them celebrating in the pages of the Bible. And it can become for us a great template of how we're supposed to respond when God gives us victories, both small and large. How do we respond? Do we just have a ticker tape parade and dance in the streets for a day and then, you know, just wait for the next war to break out so we can pray and call on the Lord or is there something more to learn from it all? That's why certain psalms in the Psalter are helpful because they are written in the wake of a military victory, which can become for us a helpful, God-breathed instruction manual for how we're supposed to respond when God brings us victory.

In the last series, we've talked a lot about trials and the difficulties. Today, I want to lean more in favor of thinking about infertwhat happens when God brings us through that. What happens when there's relief, right? Whether it's a medical trial or a financial problem or some kind of



relational trial. When we get through that in our problem the big crisis of our lives currently is now in the past how are we supposed to celebrate? How are we supposed to respond? And it is surprising when you look at the psalm I'd like us to study this morning in Psalm 76, that it has some elements that most of us wouldn't think of, but this is what God would have us do next time we experience the relief of victory, large or small, and we say, okay, God, I want to learn from this psalm and make sure I understand what we ought to do. Many parallels to the challenges we face, even the small ones in our lives, when we see the kinds of trials the people of God have been through. So turn to Psalm 76, and let's learn from this psalm as to how you and I should respond as God's people and so helpful for us. But to do this and, even if you don't like history, I hope you like biblical history. We need to kind of get the context for all of it. And so let me give you the big picture that will bring us to see that this psalm is written in a time that probably has some sense of orientation in your memory of Old Testament history. So let's just be rough and dirty with dates right here. But let's start at 2000 B.C. So 2,000 years before Christ God calls Abraham out of Ur of Chaldeans and he says to him, I'm going to make you a nation out of your descendants. Remember the whole drama of all that? They were infertile but they had a child, Isaac. And this is the child of promise. And from this patriarchal family we're going to have a whole nation of people who are going to respond, and they're going to be the people of God.

Roughly 500 years later God brings Moses on the scene and through Moses there's a law that is given not just a moral law but also a civil law as to how this new nation is supposed to operate. Well, God wants to be the king of the nation, of course. And roughly 500 years after that, so about 1000 B.C., they cry out for an earthly king. They want an earthly king. It is one thing to be a theocracy and look to heaven and to listen to the prophets. But we'd like to have somebody who can lead us into battle. So they cry out, of course, to Samuel. And God capitulates in this situation and says, okay, well, give them a king. I'm going to give them the king, the exact king that they want. Sunday school grads, who's the first king of Israel in the Old Testament? Saul. So Saul is picked. Now Saul is the pick of the people, even though God chose him because it's exactly what they wanted. And he falls on his face in many ways, ultimately on Mount Gilboa and dies. And so God says, I'm going to raise up another king, which he does prior to that, but he becomes the new king of Israel. He calls him a man after his own heart.

So, David. David is now made the king of Israel. There's a lot of drama in that transition but he becomes the king of Israel. And this king, we learn, is going to be the king through which we're going to have the ultimate King of the world. So God's people, Joshua brings them into the land, the next generation after Moses, we have a law that is given to them how they're functioning as a nation. Then we have a kingdom that is made and we think, okay, this is going to go on quite nicely, but it doesn't because David has a son. After David does all the military campaigns, Solomon now enters the scene. He's got a golden spoon in his mouth. Everything's gone well for him. He's got the opportunity to write all these books of the Bible because he is living in peacetime and luxury with all the wealth of the world. The Queen of Sheba is coming to see him, and it's just the golden era of Israel in the Old Testament. Okay. He has a son, Rehoboam. Rehoboam is kind of a knucklehead. That's the theological word for it. He's kind of a knucklehead. And he does some dumb things as a young leader. And



because of his stupidity the nation is split. Now, sadly, the guy who goes in the other direction rhymes with his name, but his name is Jeroboam. So Jeroboam becomes the king of the north and Rehoboam the king of the south and we have the beginning of a divided kingdom we call it, two kingdoms, the North and the South. If you have been around church for a while you know that much about the Old Testament history.

So we got three kings, in a united monarchy. Then we have the divided kingdom. And then if you think, okay, what's next? Well, you got a series of kings, right? A lot of kings, 20 in each part of this nation. Right? Ephraim or Jacob in the north and Judah in the south. You have this split and they're separated by their worship center. They're separated by all kinds of division and infighting and civil war. But at the end of the day we know that the North is going to fall to the Assyrian Empire in 721, and the South is going to fall to the Babylonians in 586. Now, we know a lot about the fall of the South because we read stories about Daniel and Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, as we call them, and all the stuff that goes on with the fall of the south, they're brought away to captivity and brought back 70 years later. And we see those last books of the Old Testament written, Ezra and Nehemiah give us the time frame, and then Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi in the Old Testament, those prophets speaking to the post-exilic period, blah blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Okay. That's kind of the framework, right? There's the Old Testament in, what was that, three minutes? Some key dates that we don't know so much about, or we don't know what the happenings are, is in 721. Hosea is the last king of the North and not a great king. It's bad. And the powers that be are the Assyrians and Shalmaneser the Fifth is the king who is leaning in on before that Tiglath-pileser. And he really starts the decline of the Northern Kingdom because he's flexing his muscles. But it was a Shalmaneser ultimately who gets Hosea at the end of this reign of the North to be nothing more than a vassal king. He's paying tribute. He's giving money just to survive. And then finally he goes down. Sargon the Second, the successor to Shalmaneser the Fifth. He ends up saying, okay, you're done and the northern tribes collapse and they're done.

Well, when that happens, the southern tribe and you might think, well, how did the southern tribe survive that? They're a smaller tribe, even though they have the capital city of Jerusalem there in the south. But it seems like the ramping up of this world power, the Assyrians, I mean, why didn't, you know, Sargon just march right in and take over the South? Well, his successor wanted to. Ten years after the fall of the northern tribes there was an attack upon Judah, the southern tribes. And that attack upon Judah they've got a new Assyrian king now. His name is Sennacherib. There are a lot of names we haven't named our children, but you can name your dog after him if you want. Sennacherib. I like that name. Sennacherib. Sennacherib is the king who says, you know what? My predecessors here have done a lot to take over the territory of Israel. Let's just finish the deal and get it done. And the king at that time in the South is Hezekiah. So Hezekiah in the eighth century into the eighth century, he is now trying to hold on to his territory and to keep Judah alive. And Isaiah tells the story. Second Kings 18 and 19 tells the story. And of course, it's retold in the Chronicles. So all of this is very important because you'd think, well, the South has got its back up against a wall and it really does. This is a really hard time, especially when Sennacherib says we're taking you down. And Hezekiah does everything he can to placate. He gives him silver, he gives him



gold, he gives him tribute, he gives him all that he possibly could give him just to keep his reign and his nation intact, the southern tribes of Israel. He even goes into the temple, by the way, and strips off all the precious metals, the gold and silver from the temple, and gives it all to the Assyrians. So this is just bad.

Well, he sends his envoys and his princes down into Judah and they refuse to speak in a language other than the language of the people so that they can fearmonger. Right? This isn't just propaganda. These are promises and threats from the Assyrian nation. And here comes the message from Sennacherib through his prince to the people of Judah and it's spoken of throughout the kingdom. And that is this: you guys need to surrender. You guys need to give up. I will take you captive. I will settle this land. But I'm going to take you, if you cooperate and surrender, I will take you back to Assyria and you can live peaceably. You can have your own fig tree. Your own vine. I'll give you a... It's not like I'm going to conscript you into slavery. I will own you but, you know, I'll let you live. Well, everyone's afraid. This is wartime. Because now when Hezekiah says no, the Assyrians start raiding, raiding in a place where they don't just take over the villages. Here's what the Bible says. They take over all the fortified cities of Judea. So we have in Judah all the fortified, the walled cities, are taken, and everyone backs up to Jerusalem because this is the capital city. This is where the king lives, this is where Hezekiah the king is, and everyone... He's holed up there with all of his soldiers within the walls. It's cramped now. All the villages now are destitute. No one's there. They're all in the city. The walled city of Jerusalem.

Sennacherib outnumbers them. They've got 185,000 troops that have surrounded all of Jerusalem. And Hezekiah is just at his wit's end. The letter, the official letter that was sent of threat and the demand to surrender was brought to him. And he goes in after trying everything, trying to buy his way out of the problem, he takes this letter and he goes in before God and he lays it down on the ground and he just lays himself out on the ground and he just cries out in desperation, just like you would, and just like what are we going to do? Right? There's no possible way we all walled up in this city can take the 185,000-armed soldiers with their swords sated with blood. I mean, they've already succeeded. Not only has Assyria swept through the north, but now it's decimated all the fortified cities of the south. This is not going to work out. And he prays before God. Now God loves when we trust in him. It would be great if you trusted in him when your back wasn't up against the wall. That's what God wants. And by the way, none of this is a surprise to God. It's not like a lot of people would say today God has to do a miracle because all these circumstances kind of took him by surprise. They won't say that but that's kind of what they think. In other words, we need a miracle now. My mom's got cancer. That's what they'll say. And it's like, well, why didn't he just stop the cancer before it got there, right? I mean, we don't realize that circumstantially God is providential over all these things. But here is a situation where God had got Hezekiah to a place where he's a completely broken king and has nothing else to do but to cry out to God and say, "God, please help. I have nowhere else to go but to you." And I think we've all found ourselves in situations like that. It's sad that it takes all those circumstances to get us there, but it certainly tested Hezekiah's faith.



And so Hezekiah pours out his heart in Second Kings Chapter 19, and he says, God, please save us. And there's a lot of drama behind the scenes and we can read about in Isaiah. And it's an interesting historical story. But what happens is as he's there and holed up in the city and we think it's all over for them, the Assyrians are starting to build siege ramps and they're starting to come and take the capital city and take them down, just like they did their northern brothers up in the ten tribes of the North. God does a miracle. One night when all of these soldiers are out there getting ready to take Jerusalem, it says in Second Kings 19, "The angel of the Lord went out," among the soldiers, "and struck them down." Now think about that. 185,000, that's about the population of Huntington Beach, California. That's a lot of people. And all of a sudden now in their sleep they all just freeze up and die. They die, 185,000 people. And all of a sudden now the joy of looking out, I mean, all the scouts looking out around at what's going on are like, they're not moving, they're not moving. And finally, we send someone out to check and it's like, these people are all dead. Not just them, their horses are dead. There are chariots and there's nothing but swords and money and food. It's all there, and it's all there for the Israelites to plunder. They were holed up and there was victory, a miraculous victory of God. God doesn't do these miracles very often in the Bible, it's pretty rare. But when he does it he's making a point. And we want to gather that point from the psalm of victory. And the psalm of victory is spelled out for us in Psalm 76.

So let's read how they celebrated, and then we'll start to piece all these things together as you know the historical backdrop to this psalm. Okay. You ready? So let's read it. I'll read it from the English Standard Version starting in verse 1. Actually, I'll start with the superscription here, just for the sake of completeness, which is not a part of the Bible, but put in later but very old, "To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song." Of course, Asaph is a bit anachronistic if you don't understand Asaph. If you think about the Asaph who worked with David, this is not the Asaph who worked with David. And if it is a person, if not a class of people within the monarchy of Hezekiah, right? It's at least a different Asaph because there's no possible way this could be the Asaph of David's day. That's probably six sentences that I didn't need to say. But there they are. For the, you know, the overachiever in the room. Okay.

Verse 1. Let's read it. "In Judah, God is known." Never before has he been known in that generation like he's known this day. "God is known; and his name is great in Israel." You can imagine the ticker tape parades going on in Israel that day, right? "His abode has been established in Salem." What's the capital city of Israel, of Judah? What is it? Jerusalem. If you say it slowly enough, you might realize what he's saying here. Salem. Jeru-Salem. Jerusalem. Salem, by the way, its derivative comes from a word we still say in Israel today or even Jews say in America today, Shalom. Shalom is peace. Not just a greeting and a goodbye. Peace. The word Salem is the word peace. And it's not used very often in the Bible as a kind of a shortened nickname for Jerusalem. But it is here. "Jeru" probably means "foundation of," that the city is the foundation of peace. But today we're just calling it peace. It's the city of peace. Why? Because no one's sharpening their swords anymore. No one's thinking about dying anymore. We're not thinking about warfare anymore. War is over. War is over. It's the city of peace. "His abode has been established in Salem," in Jerusalem. Right? What is that? We're talking about his dwelling place. We're talking about Solomon's temple that sits right over the

corner, that we keep thinking what will the Assyrians do to the temple? I mean, we've already stripped it of its gold, but, I mean, he's going to take it down. No. "His dwelling place in Zion." Every time we see the word Zion, even though it is one of the hills of Jerusalem, it usually is giving us a sense of a poet or a lyric writer just celebrating the fact that this hill in Jerusalem where the temple is, it's just kind of a prototype of the real thing, that it's a symbol, it's a reflection, it's a type of the real thing of God's dwelling place. Okay.

His dwelling place really isn't here. And Solomon knew you that can't build a house where God's going to live. But it's a representation of where God lives. And so "His dwelling place in Zion," which is earthly but ultimately heavenly. What did he do in Jerusalem in the city of peace? Well, "There he broke the flashing arrows." Can you imagine being a daytime scout looking over the walls of the fortified city of Jerusalem and seeing in the sunlight a 185,000 warriors, and all of them have swords in their hands. I mean you'd see a lot of flashing swords. And you can see a lot of sun bouncing off their shields. "The shields and the swords and the weapons of war ... he broke them." Broke them. Well, how did he do it? Well, he did it because he killed them all in their sleep. "Glorious are you," verse 4, "more majestic than the mountains full of prey." Right? Think about it. You have here the hunters coming to hunt the soldiers and the citizens of Jerusalem that now are going to be plundered by people getting stuff off of them. And the animals of the field are going to come and eat them up. Right? You just think about that. Here you have the mountains full of dead bodies and "The stouthearted," they were so brave, they're the courageous soldiers, "they were stripped of their spoil." All that they came with, all their meals ready to eat, all their daggers, all their swords, they get it all stripped away. Why? Because "They sank into a sleep," just like Second Kings 19 says. They all just died in their sleep. "All the men of war were unable to use their hands." They weren't even moving anymore. They were just laying still and dead. How did that happen?

Verse 6, "At your rebuke, O God of Jacob," going back to the patriarchs, thinking of the promises that you will be our God and we will be your people, "both rider and horse lay stunned." Even the animals were dead. This is amazing. So what do we do? Let's call a parade. Let's have a parade. Let's get the bands out and play. "You," O God, "are to be feared." Now there's the first kind of interesting countercultural response to a victory parade. We ought to fear the Lord. Why? "Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused?" It'd be kind of scary to walk out one day when you are hearing and seeing the clamor and flashing and glittering swords of the enemy, and all of a sudden now they're all dead. I guarantee you, you're going to be like, whoa, "Who can stand before you once your anger is roused." You're done with the Assyrians taken over Israel, done with it. "From heaven you uttered judgment," is like you in the boardroom of heaven just sat there like, no, no more with the Assyrians, you know, let's just kill them, right? "You uttered a judgment and the earth feared and was still," right? The loaded language of this psalm, when you know what happened historically, they're all just dead. There are just corpses out there. "When God arose to establish judgment, to save all the humble of the earth. Selah." The humble of the earth. Now you're pretty humbled for a couple of reasons. We'll look at those in a minute. But you certainly humble now in the fear of God, thinking, wow, we were just saved. We were outnumbered. We were outgunned, and you saved us. "Surely the wrath of man," which was



what the Assyrians had a bunch of men trying to kill us, "shall praise you." Hmhm. How'd that work? More on that in a minute.

"The remnant of wrath," what's left of wrath, "you will put on like a belt." Okay. That's interesting. What does that mean? More on that in a minute. Verse 11. What do we do? "Make your vows," to Yahweh your God, "to the Lord your God and perform them; let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared, who cuts off the spirit of princes." All those princes who came and gave the message to scare the Judeans, right? "Cut off." They're now running back, not only the princes, but "who is to be feared by the kings of the earth." Hey, you can think back to Sargon, Shalmaneser, Tiglath-pileser or now Sennacherib. Sennacherib literally running back to his home scared. His whole team had just died. Amazing. So let's think, let's figure this out. I want us to understand verses 1 through 6. In light of normal living in this era when we get out of a jam, God is not going to, in our generation, going to do as a regular occurrence, if at all, what he did here, because God doesn't need to do that. The whole point of this is learn to trust me, right? Because I am your deliverer. And sometimes, like Hezekiah, you get your back up against a wall and you finally start praying in a new way, trusting, transferring trust to God. But the point is we should know that God is our protector. And you should know that God is a great protector. As it says at the beginning of this psalm, we should see how great God is, right? "Great is his name in Israel." We know God is involved in this and we know God is great. That's how we should view any victory in our lives, whether it's health, financial, relational, career wise, housing wise, whatever it is.

So number one, let's put it this way. You need to "See the Greatness of God's Protection." God is our protector. The first psalm ever written in the Bible. Think, think, think, think, think Sunday school grads. What's the first psalm in the Bible? When they sing the psalm in Exodus and they call God the "Man of war." Did you ever realize that? The first psalm in the Bible and the last psalm in the Bible, in the book of Revelation, are all about God being a fighter, a warrior. He's a warrior who defends his people. There are a lot of men of war who have just died out on the field because you had a decision made by the ultimate warrior, the man of war, God in heaven saying we're done with this, we're done with this. And I don't want to make too many parallels here, but you think about Germany and Japan and Italy in World War II, right? And it took about 185,000 people who died, sadly. And you can have your views on all that. But it did end the war when the bombs were dropped and it came to the fact that this was done. We're done. Right? We're done with a world dominance of what was thought through in terms of the Third Reich and ultimately Imperial Japan. We're done. And the reality is that God does this himself without any use of our bombs or our planes. And God goes, I'm going to put an end to the aggressor because I am the man of war. I am the defender of my people.

Okay, let's break this down with a few sub-points. Number one, Letter "A," let's start with this. Right? "God Has the Power to Protect." Let's just remember that. He has the power to protect and you need to think of it that way. And we don't think of it that way the way we should. Speaking of Second Kings, let's go to Second Kings 6. Second Kings Chapter 6. Just to make a point that you should make in your own mind every single day. And before we read this little section of Second Kings 6, can you please remember some of the basic promises of God? It

starts with Abraham and it continues on in every generation, just about. And that is this: "I will be with you." Okay. Think about the New Testament promises. I will be with you. "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Hebrews 13. I will be with you. Matthew 28, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." So God's people, the disciples of Christ, God is going to be with them all the way to the end, and that's us. God's going to be with us, right? How about John 14? Even when Jesus says, "I'm going to go away, but I will come back to receive you." But "I'm not going to leave you as orphans," he says in the Upper Room Discourse. I'm going to send the helper, the Paracletos, as you will not be alone. I will be with you, right? I will be with you. The Triune God will be with you. Everything in the Bible reminds us, the people of God, God is with us.

Now here's the problem as First Peter 1 says, you can't see him, you can't see him. But God is a man of war. He's a warrior. He's, as even as the Bible says, he is a dread warrior, and he is here to protect his people. He has the power, the overarching power. We call it omnipotence. He has omni-power to protect his people. So God has power to protect. Now, in Second Kings Chapter 6, after the taking of Elijah before the eyes of Elisha, as he sees the chariots of fire come down and pick up Elijah and he goes away, Elisha now gets the ministry of being the prophet and leading the school of the prophets in Israel. And he has an assistant who is with him. And just like Hezekiah seeing the city of Jerusalem surrounded by enemies, Elisha and his assistant see the city surrounded by enemies. And look at what happens here in his context, different geographical context. But look what happens in verse 15, dropped down there. Second Kings 6:15. "When the servant of the man of God," that's the assistant of Elisha, "rose early in the morning he went out, and behold, an army with horses and chariots were all around the city." He sees the enemy. "And the servant said, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?'" Right? That's what Hezekiah was saying, what are we going to do? And he wasn't the assistant, he was the king. I don't know what we're going to do. We can't win this battle. And Elisha says, verse 16, the man of God says, Second Kings 6:16, is that where I took you? Okay. "He said, 'Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.'"

Now there's the new math, because he couldn't compute this. I don't understand, right? We are not more than them. There are more enemies around us than there are our people. So we're outnumbered. But Elisha knew what he was talking about because he believed the promise of God that God would be with his people. "So Elisha prayed," verse 17 "and said, 'O Lord, O Yahweh, please open his eyes that he may see.' So Yahweh, the Lord opened the eyes of the young man," the assistant to Elisha, "and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." Now that's the reality. God had a special interest and power. Chariots of fire that could come down and sweep Elijah away. Those chariots of fire are surrounding Elisha. I know we're surrounded by enemies, but we're surrounded by God because God says he'll never leave us or forsake us. And his messengers, that's what the word angel means, his messengers are dispatched to protect us. Right? That's the promise of Hebrews Chapter 1. His ministering spirits are protecting us, but God himself is protecting us. The general of heaven is within us and the Bible says he has power to protect. If you think about the simple promise, God will be with you, I need you to think we have the all-powerful King of the universe who can kill 185,000 seasoned warriors

with just lifting a pinky in a boardroom and saying we're done with those guys and it'll be over. Okay, now, I know this causes problems in your mind because you're thinking, wait a minute, my mom's got cancer. All I want is for those cancer cells to go away. Can you lift a finger to that? Absolutely he can, 100%. So let's start with that he has the power. And I'm going to make this a little bit worse for those of you going through the trial. But if you've been through the trial then you can celebrate in the present that God has the power because he's exercised some power somehow to get you out of the jam.

Okay. Secondly, Letter "B," let's put it this way. Right? "He also Has the Interest to Protect." He not only has the power to protect, there are some people who have power to protect me but they have no interest in me. God has the interest to protect. I want you to think about it in terms of what we just went through in the book of Acts. We've seen Paul retell the story twice, but it started in Acts Chapter 9 and repeats it all three times that God out of heaven, particularly the second person of the Godhead says to Saul of Tarsus, soon to be Paul the Apostle. Hey, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting," here's a personal pronoun, "me." Why are you persecuting me? Now if I want to persecute Jesus how can I do it? I can't do it. Does he have toenails? He has toenails. What if I do take pliers and pull one of those toenails off? I'm going to do that. Well, I can't get to him, right? Because he's in some other weird dimension. He blew off the top of the Mount of Olives. I can't, I mean, I can find my pliers but I can't find his toenails. Right? I'll stick a nail in his eye. I can't do it. I cannot persecute, I cannot torture Jesus. There's no possible way because he's not here, right? He's at the "Right hand of the Majesty on high," to quote Hebrews 1. I just can't do it. But Paul was doing it when he was Saul of Tarsus. How was he doing it? Well, you know, he's on the way to Damascus to kill Christians. He was there to imprison Christians. He was there to take property away from Christians. He was going to make Christians a really bad time. Make them suffer. And Jesus says, you're persecuting me. Why? Because of the simple theology of the New Testament. He is the head and we are his body. So Saul starts messing with you, you may be the toenail of Christ, a humble person, right? But if someone is messing with the toenail of Christ, guess what? He's messing with God. The all-powerful God who has the power to protect you and he has the interest to protect you because it's like this one organism.

So much so I spoke about the eye, poking Jesus in the eye with a nail. Forgive me this blasphemous illustration, but you know what? That's a good illustration, because both in the book of Deuteronomy Chapter 32 and also in the Psalms, good to jot this one down, Psalm 17 verse 8. We have a picture of God being a person and I am a part of him, and I'm not a part of the body like the neck down, I'm actually on his face, I'm actually the apple of his eye. And apple means the dark part of your eye. The lens is the cornea of the eye. So put your name in here. Mike Fabarez is the apple of God's eye because through Christ, I am now integrated into the body of Christ and I am like the apple of the eye. I can do a lot of things to you, slap you on the back, give you knuckles, I can high-five you. I can shake your hand, I can punch you in the chest, and you probably will go that's a little too touchy for me, but whatever. But if I take my finger out and poke you in the eye we're going to have problems, aren't we? I better be ready for some defensive moves because I don't care if you're the most delicate woman in the room, if I poke you. now you're going to respond. You'll probably try to slap me. Because



you don't mess with your eyeball. If you mess the eyeball, you're going to get a reaction. And the Bible says on multiple occasions I am like the cornea of the eyeball of God. And you start messing with me whether I'm a Christian in Damascus in the first century or a Christian in Southern California in the 21st century, it's as though God's eye is being messed with. That's a helpful thing for me to remember. God has the power to protect. He has the interest to protect. I'm a part of God, right? I'm not God but I am the body of Christ. That's helpful, but it's hurtful if you're in the middle of a trial. And I'm trying to preach about victories, how to celebrate in the victories. Right? And I need to first just see the greatness of him because we don't connect the dots. But you may be sitting here saying, now, this makes it worse for me because I'm losing, right? My spouse died. I lost my job. I can't find a spouse. We're not having a baby. Whatever your problem is, I'm being sued. My body is riddled with cancer. I'm not winning this thing. You can think you just made it worse because you said God has the power and the interest. And if God has the power and interest and he's not doing I got a problem with that. Because, yeah, we can talk about, you know, Hezekiah. Well, good for you, Hezekiah. I'm not winning. Okay.

Turn with me to Lamentations. Remember this: Lamentations was written by Jeremiah. Jeremiah is like the equivalent, if you will, of Hezekiah, who's a king praying, God, please save and God saved. Jeremiah said, please save. That's what he wanted. And guess what? God did not save. Finally, Jerusalem, think about this now, 200 years later is surrounded not by the Assyrians and not under the direction of Sennacherib, but now surrounded by Babylonians, same city, same walls, as dispatched by Nebuchadnezzar. And they prayed, I'm sure. How many times did Jeremiah pray? I don't know, we'll have to interview him one day. How many times do you pray for protection? He prayed for protection and it didn't happen. And so he lost. It's like us looking at a trial, praying for the trial, and we lose. Maybe it's an irreversible loss like the death of someone in your family. We lost. We lost. Okay. How do we deal with that? Well, number one, we don't just start detaching God from the circumstance. Look at verse 1. Lamentations Chapter 3. I know these are hard truths but let's listen to this, verse 1. "I am a man who has seen affliction," Jeremiah says, "under the rod of his wrath." That I understand. You can think about mediation. You can think about, well, when Job was suffering, as we've been reading in our Daily Bible Reading, he was suffering because Satan was attacking him. Yeah, but Satan wouldn't attack him if God didn't let the leash out. Right? You would agree with that. And when Job in his responses to God, as we've read this week, is shaking his fist at God, he's got a point, does he not? I mean, he's better than the other people in his town. He's the best in town. He's the best moral guy around and still he sees himself suffering, the Sabeans steal his stuff, the storms crash the house of his kids, they die. He's got a body with cells that are out of control. He's scraping boils off of his body. He's in bad shape and he's saying, God, why did YOU do this to me? Well you think that was Satan. Stop with that. Jeremiah understands I'm under the rod of your anger. "He has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; surely against me he turns his hand again and again the whole day long."

Okay, well, this sounds like a terrible book to read. Look at the rest of this. Drop down to verse 19. We'll get to the heart of it. "Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall!" That's like poison, it tastes terrible. "My soul continually remembers



it and is bowed down within me." But, okay, here it is. The battle has been lost in Jerusalem. But, but but... "I'll call this to mind," this I'm going to call to mind and "therefore I'll have hope." Well, I can't wait to what comes after the colon here. How are you going to have hope? I'm going to have hope this way. Here it comes, verse 22. The "Hesed," "the steadfast love of the Lord. Hesed. Hesed is the Hebrew word that translates the phrase "steadfast love." Steadfast love is a reminder that God has put a covenant commitment to love someone not based on feelings, but based on his promise. His faithful love, his steadfast love. He has said, I will love you. Oftentimes he puts it for the sake of Moses, for the sake of Abraham, for the sake of David. But ultimately we know for the sake of Christ we are loved. We know this from the transaction of the New Testament. The only one who's perfect to be perfectly loved by the perfect God is his Son and on behalf of Christ he's promised to forgive us, he's promised to love us, he's promised to never leave us, and he promised never to forsake us, he promised to be our protector, our fortress and our rock. That's what he promised. And he says, because I know you've made that promise, your steadfast devotion of love to me, I know this, I'll have hope, because that "never ceases," it's never going to go away. Your "mercies," your kindness. I'm still alive writing this poem, right? They will "never ever come to an end; they're new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

Now we just lost the battle. But even in this, and this is a different series I realize, this is about the trials and the defeats, but he says in the midst of it all, "Yahweh is my portion," my soul says, "therefore I'm going to have hope," because I'm going to lean into that. I don't have the victory in the battle, but I have him, and I know if I just wait, verse 25, "The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul of those who seek him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the," hears a word, "salvation of the Lord." Now when you read the word salvation in the Old Testament usually it's tied to a temporal victory. When Hezekiah says, I want to celebrate your salvation, Lord. He's thinking would the Assyrians please die? When Jeremiah's praying for salvation he's usually praying for the salvation of Jerusalem against the Babylonians.

You've been so conditioned because of New Testament teaching, and rightfully so, when you hear the word salvation, you're not thinking about the lawsuit. You're not thinking about your health crisis. You're not thinking about your relationships. You're thinking about something beyond the temporal horizon of this life, and rightly so, because salvation is ultimately about the winning of the war, not the winning of the battle. And I know this, we should celebrate every battle that we win, every one of them. You get something answered to prayer, something good, praise the Lord. I'm trying to give you instructions about how to celebrate the victory. "Well, it doesn't sound like it, Pastor Mike." I'm trying to. I'll get to that. But right now I'm saying when you lose, know this, the thing that's never going away is the win. And the win is you are protected all the way to the Promised Land. And the journey to the Promised Land may be filled with a lot of stub toes and a lot of suffering and pain and a lot of battles that you lose. All of those are under the purview of God's sovereignty. He's got a plan for every one of those. He's going to work all things together for good in his big plan. But I know the war is never lost. I understand we can have some problems along the way, and they may be big problems, but the war is not lost. One more passage and we'll be done with point one as though we would ever be done with point one. But let's go to First Peter Chapter 1, First Peter



Chapter 1. Let's get this stretched out to where we ultimately need to be. Because if you got nothing to thank God for, although you do, because you got a lot less to thank God for than Jeremiah but you've got something to thank God for. His mercies are new even today for you in some way. But if you think you got nothing, you've had no wins on the scoreboard, here's the deal. The ultimate is the game is won. You may step into the batter's box, say, I've struck out every inning so far. I get it. But the game, we're going to win the game. You're going to win the game.

Verse 3 First Peter 1, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy," because you don't deserve it, "has caused us to be born again." Something new inside of me based on the Old Testament promise of a new covenant, I'm now new inside. "I have a living hope." How do I know it's living? Because my captain, the one I'm trusting in, has been raised from the dead, "from the resurrection of Christ from the dead, to an inheritance." That's what I want. I'd like to win the battle. "That is an imperishable one and an undefiled one, an unfading one." And guess what? "It's kept in heaven for me," I get that. "Who by God's power are," here's our word, "guarded," protected. Right? He's the rock and fortress. They'll never let that go through faith "for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Now think about that. It's just like Jesus said in his great High Priestly Prayer in John 17. "You've given me these disciples," Father, you've given me, and guess what? "I've kept them all. I've kept them all except for the Son of Perdition." But that was part of the prophetic plan. And I know that Judas is gone, but all these ones, "My sheep hear my voice ... they follow me... No one is going to snatch them from my hands. I will protect them to thee. And that's why Paul can say when he's about to, as I've said many times in the last series, in Second Timothy Chapter 4, he can say, I know I'm about to lose my head by the Romans. I'm going to die, but he's going to "bring me safely into his kingdom." That's the win. The win is that we all win if we're Christians and trusting in Christ. But I know that there are more wins than sometimes we want to give God credit for. But we should.

And I know that right now we're focused sometimes on the problems. Look at the next line, verse 6. "In this you rejoice," or at least we should, "though now for a little while," seems like a long while God, "if necessary," I wish it weren't necessary, "you have been grieved." Oh, that's the hard part. Hard for me to rejoice when I'm grieved. But you want me to rejoice when I'm grieved "by the various trials." You've got losses, you got strikeouts. You got hit with a pitch. I understand that. But all of that's happening "so that the tested genuineness of your faith." Hey, Hezekiah, if you could just trust me. Which later when he has a health problem and he doesn't trust God, he trusts the physicians instead of God. We need to trust God. If you could just trust God and have that tested in the trials of your life, in the losses of your life, you will find that to be "more precious than gold," which even though "that perishes," it's going to perish one day, "though it's tested by fire." But that's the point we're to be tested by fire, "may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Christ," when he shows up, "though you haven't seen him." This is the problem. We don't see him, but "we love him. Though you don't see him now, but you believe in him," you trust in him, "you rejoice with the joy that's inexpressible and filled with glory." Oh, I wish it could be. I wish we would. Because I know this is true. "Obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." See, even in the losses, and I just lean on this because I'm a pastor looking out at people and



I realize that we got a lot of losses in the room. I'd like you, though, to celebrate the victories by knowing that every little victory, even if you cannot stop, you cannot stop saying I'm not going to celebrate because I got these five losses in my life this year. Okay, you got losses. Great. You got an ultimate win. And you do have other wins. And those victories need to be celebrated.

Back to our passage, verse 7, Psalm 76 verse 7. Let's start there. I see God's protection and I should see it even past all the failures. But what I need to do is to celebrate like this, verse 7. I need to look to God, the God who has just delivered me from whatever the problem is. Have you got any wins lately? Well, here's what you should do. Have a ticker tape parade. But as you do you need to know, you need to fear God. "But you, you are to be feared! Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused? From heaven you've uttered judgment; the earth feared and was still, when God arose to establish judgment, to save all the humble of the earth." I need to fear God with a humble heart. Think about this. I need to fear God with a humble heart. Why? Because every victory, even if you don't see it as a spiritual battle, it was a spiritual battle. The Bible says we're not wrestling against flesh and blood. We're wrestling against principalities and powers and forces of darkness. Right? Spiritual forces in the cosmic dealings of God. Just read Daniel 7, 8, and 9, and you'll see there are all kinds of demonic things going on. Or go back to what we've been reading on our Daily Bible Reading, Job Chapters 1 and 2. Even the sickness, even the thefts that took place, even the deaths in his family, Satan was involved in this. Now did God let the leash out? Sure he did. Here's the question for you. When God pulled the leash back in Job 38, 39, 40, and 41, he started to go, no, no, no, we're done now. No longer. And he restores Job twofold. There's the victory, twofold. He looks back with pain. That was a hard season. But now how hard is it to pull back Satan? Something you can't do, right? Here God pulls back Satan.

What did Satan think about Job flourishing, twice as rich as he was before, twice as blessed as he was before? That was Satan's whole complaint. I can't believe you bless him like that. That's the only reason he loves you. Let's destroy him. Satan comes to steal, kill and destroy, John 10. That's what Satan wants to do to your life. And whatever's gone on bad in your life, even though God sovereignly allows it, and you can rightly say, God, why are you doing this to me? Right? There is an answer. But the reality is there's an agency, the evil in your life that has touched your life, the evil that has touched your company, the evil that has touched your family, the evil that has touched you, you just need to know for God to say I'm done with that is like killing 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. It's not easy to do. It's easy for him. It's not easy for you. You should fear him because of his deliverance, right? Think of Psalm 103, "Heals all my diseases." They're going to be disease that probably takes you down, most of you, unless you die in a violent accident. I understand that there's going to be disease that takes you home. But here's the deal you've gotten here so far. If you're cogent and cognizant, listening to me and you understand my words, you understand, you've gotten through all of those. You're managing through all those. God has given victory in every one of those things. And I'll bet if you look for it and start to see the greatness of God's protection on your life you can start to celebrate it. But the first thing you need to celebrate with is a humble fear.



Matter of fact, let's jot that down and we'll drill in a little deeper. Number two, "Be Humble and Fear the Lord." That's the thing we need to do. That's what the text is teaching us to do. Fear the Lord and be humble. Be humble. Why? Because he saves the humble? Now, how would you feel if we were in the fortress of Jerusalem and we see 185,000 soldiers that the glistening steel of their swords we've been looking at every day in panic? I've got my wife and my kids tucked under the bed in some cramped quarters because the villagers are now in the walled city and I look out there and now the soldiers are still and dead. The next morning they're dead. Okay, I'm going to fear the Lord and I'm going to be humbled by that. Because guess what? Just like David before Goliath, it doesn't seem like this adds up that I should even be winning. But how can I affect the cells in my body? How can I turn the tide of the legal system? How can I change the, you know, the policies at work? I can't do that. We are really incapable of doing so much. But when it happens, we need to say God is great and I should be humbled by that. I'm humbled because I know it's all of God. And that humility leads me to not only be humble at the power of God, or the exercise of the power of God in him pulling back the enemy in the attacks of my life, but I need to start saying I'm humbled by the fact that I would even be the object of God's care.

How in the world can I be the apple of your eye, I'm a sinner? How can it be that you would care about me and really take it personally when something bad happens to me? I'm humbled even by the salvation. Why would God save me? And I hope you have a clarity about your own sin enough to know that that's an amazing thing. "Amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." That will get you to the place of recognizing that we're humbled just by the fact that God would take you through any trial. Because guess where you and I belong? "Outer darkness where there's weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth." You violated the standards of your holy creator. You should not be experiencing any of his blessings. And yet we are blessed in the heavenly places with every spiritual blessing that we're going to inherit one day and the Spirit is a promise of that inheritance. But right now we got little victories, a blessing here, a blessing there, a blessing over here. I bet I could go and evaluate your life and spend all week just evaluating your life and I could chronicle a ton of blessings that God has given you. And I can say this: you didn't deserve any of those. I know it's cute to say when I ask you in the lobby how you're doing and you say, "Better than I deserve," right? But if I responded, yeah, you deserve "Outer darkness where there's weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth." We'll test your theology whether you mean that or not. Because that's where you and I belong, in the Lake of Fire.

So every blessing needs to be... It's not a trite greeting on the patio. This needs to be a sense in which I am humbled by the fact that God would save me. I even see that God's judgments, like Nebuchadnezzar coming into and destroying Jerusalem 200 years later, are God using the wrath of man to praise you. Right? You see that in Psalm verse 10? "Surely the wrath of man shall praise you; the remnant of wrath," whatever's left of the wrath, "shall you put on like a belt." You're going to wear it as a good thing. There's been a lot of writings lately about the glory of God in his judgments. But though evil and wicked in the world, people say, why's all the sin in the world? God is using this sin ultimately to glorify himself. Ask Habakkuk about all this. Habakkuk writes as he watches the Assyrians take the northern tribes and he says, how in the world can you use sinners to discipline us? They're not as righteous as we are. I mean,



we may not be doing really great, but who are they to do this to us? And God makes it clear you need to think this through, Habakkuk. Right? I'm going to be glorified even in the way I allow these trials. And though we can't figure that all out now, the whole 8:28 of Romans thing, how is this going to be good somehow?" God says it will. You need to trust me that I'm going to glorify myself in the strikeouts, and ultimately we're going to win this thing, and you're going to look back when we look at all the stats of how this game worked out for you, that God was working to glorify himself in the ups and downs of your life. We have to trust him in this. It's a humbling thing.

So much more I can say about this and I wish I had time. But I got to press on to verse 11. Verse 11. We got to respond to God. Okay. I should think in a certain way about God. I should fear him. I should be humbled by him. God gives grace to the humble, opposes the proud. So I want to be a humble person. But now I need to respond. "Make your vows to the Lord your God and perform them," verse 11, "let all around him bring gifts to him who is to be feared, who cuts off," the princes, "the spirit of the princes, who is to be feared by the kings of the earth." Right? I know Sennacherib, and I know his princes. They should be ashamed. But God has the power to fix the problem and I should realize as a recipient of God's protection, I want to generously thank him.

Number three, "Be Generous in Your Thanksgiving," and you should be generous. And I mean generous, not just with your words although let's start with your words. You do need to say thank you, right? It's like when you tell your toddler to come up to me because I get him a donut, right? And you say to your little Johnny, "Oh, Johnny, tell Pastor Mike thank you." You know how that usually goes, right? (In a weak voice) "Thank you. Thank you." One of my standard responses to parents that I don't think I'm going to hack off too badly, I often say to Johnny, "Johnny only if you mean it," right? Only if you mean it. Now again, that's tongue in cheek. Although that's the whole goal, isn't it? Don't you want your kid to mean it? It's hard to mean it. It's hard to stop and give thanks. But when God does something good for you ought to stop and give thanks. There were a lot of people dancing in the streets on August 14th of 1945. But they weren't giving thanks to God. Now some were. But what we need to do is to stop the ticker tape parade for a minute and just be thankful. And we need to give a sacrifice of praise. And it is a sacrifice that the fruit of our lips praise God. We need to give thanks to God. And I'm telling you, some of you don't thank God enough because you don't see the victory. You don't chronicle the victory. You don't see God's greatness in the protection. Right? You don't have an emotional response. If I need to fear God and be humbled by it. And then we don't even say thanks. We got to say thanks. Thanks is the first sacrifice. You need to be generous in your thanksgiving. Something's going on, you're with Christians, your leader, your family. Stop your family and let's pray. Let's just pray and thank God for that. You hear good news. And you're with Christians in your small group, let's stop and thank God for that. Let's just thank God for that. That'd be the first thing.

But we got words that aren't about your words here. Here's the word that's not about words. Vows. "Make your vows to the Lord your God and perform them; let all around him bring gifts." Okay? Gifts. You know what a vow is. Some people do not like the concept of vows. They're so snooty and pious they don't like the vows. "I don't like the vows thing." Matter of



fact, they got a word for it. They call it foxhole Christianity, right? When you're in a foxhole and bombs are over your head, you say, oh, God, please save me. And if you save me, I'll follow you or whatever, or I'll do this or that for you. They think it's making deals with God. Quid pro quo. God, you help me here and I'll do this for you and they don't like that. But God accepted that in the Old Testament as something that he regularly, voluntarily, you want to make a vow to me? You want to make like you're in trouble. You want to say, I'll do this if you do that? I'll accept that. Now, you can't manipulate God because you say, well, I'll give you \$10,000 if you get me out of this jam. You cannot manipulate God by your gifts. But I'll tell you what, it seems like a pretty consistent pattern in the Bible. And twice in the book of Acts, if you notice, Paul's making vows to God.

I don't think the vow is the problem. I think the fact that we're not generous enough to even think about a vow is the problem. We're not thinking God did this. Because if someone does something nice for you, don't you often want to respond by giving a gift? I hope so. We live in an ingrate culture, I realize. But I hope most of you were raised well enough that if someone invites you to some big dinner party and they're cooking dinner and they're not charging for dinner, this is not a restaurant, I hope you show up with something in your hands. A bouquet of flowers, a little something for the wall, a trinket, something, a thank you card. Bring them something that shows that you're thankful. And I'm thinking if I'm willing to give someone a bouquet of flowers, it cost me 28 bucks at Ralph's, for someone who cooks me a dinner that's probably worth 35 bucks, right? Think about this. I'm thinking if I'm doing that for that and I can't do for God something real tangible, I can't bring gifts to him, then what's wrong with me? Do I really have more gratitude for human beings who drive me to material gifts than I do to God? I'm just going to challenge you. You need to think about what God does something good, what will I do for God? And sometimes we make those deals in the throes of the problem. And you may call it foxhole Christianity, but there's nothing wrong with us saying to God. Matter of fact, lots of great things have happened in Church history. Think about Martin Luther. You know, the whole Protestant Reformation started with Luther directing his thoughts toward the study of Scripture, right? Because he made a deal with God in the middle of a storm.

I mean, just think through the realities of us having an opportunity to say, God, I will do this for you. We're not manipulating God. We're not really somehow leveraging God. But if God does something good for you there's nothing wrong with us saying, I'm going to make a vow and perform it. I'm going to bring him gifts because I fear him. He's the one in charge. One psalm on this, if you go to Psalm 66, please. Psalm 66. You don't have to make any vows as Ecclesiastics 5 says, "It is better for you not to make a vow," than for you to make a vow, a hasty vow, "and then not keep it." But I'm encouraging you to be thankful enough to really say to God, God, I'm so thankful. I want to give. I want to serve. I want to do something as a response to what you've done for me. Psalm 66, look at verse 8, "Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our souls among the living." Everyone in this room unless someone's died since I started talking, you're all still alive. So you're here. You made it through the week. You made it through the month. You've made it through the year. "He has not let our feet slip. For you, O God, have tested us." Right? This is Psalm 66:10, "You've tried us as silver is tried. You've brought us into the net; you've laid a crushing



burden on our backs; you let men ride over our heads; we went through the fire and through the water; yet you've brought us out in a place of abundance." And I'm telling you what now, I've got a complaint because I can't believe you took me through all that and my gift to you is just that I'm still here still being a Christian after all that. I mean, that's how some of us think. Why would I thank God for bringing me out of a trial when I know that God is a sovereign God who brought me into the trial? I'm not going to do that. Well, you better do that, because the trials are even part of the good that God is doing in testing our faith so that ultimately we can be someone who God is going to lavish rewards upon because he's going to bring us all of this stuff in response to our faithfulness and the tested faith that we have in him. It's just such a backwards way to think.

And yet the psalmist has it right. Verse 13, no, you bring me out of that problem. You've laid all this on our backs, but it's gone now. I'm out of the dark tunnel. Well, I'm going to "come into your house with burnt offerings." That's costly. "I'm going to perform my vows to you." Which vows? The vows "which my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble." Right? There's the foxhole part of it. God, please get me out of this thing and my lips said it. God, if you do this, I will do that and I got to perform those. Verse 15, "I will offer to you burnt offerings, a fattened animal." I'm going to bring the best to you. "With the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats," and I'm going to talk about it, man. "Come here, all you who fear God. I will tell you what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth and high praises on my tongue." Why? Because I was in a mess and you got me out of it. Paul says I am willing to tell the troubles of my life to other people, Second Corinthians Chapter 1, so that when God gets me out of the jam more people will be able to celebrate with me. That's what we need. You need to share your burdens. You need to share your prayer requests in your small group so that when God brings you out of it, you need to have a time when you say in your small groups, what good things has God done in your life this week? What victories have you had? Are there any wins in your life this month? You got to have times to share that. And I hope because people have been praying with you about those so you can celebrate those. And when you do, I think you need to think just beyond your words. What am I going to do for the Lord, just because he's done that for me? There's nothing wrong with that. If that sounds too fleshly for you, then I don't think you understand the Bible. The Bible is full of this kind of thinking. It was willingly accepted in the Old Testament. It's just spoken of right here. "I'm going to come into your house with burnt offerings; I will perform vows to you, which my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble." I'm going to bring you these things. It's time for us to celebrate.

I'm going to ask the ushers to come down the aisles. We're going to pass the elements of the Lord's Supper. And if you stretch beyond the victories of this month, this year, and you really look to life in general, that your sins should condemn you, but instead Christ took the condemnation for you. This is the substitutionary atonement of Christ. God was willing to lay your sins on him. These elements that you're going to get represent that. And this is the ultimate foundation, the death of Christ, of our victory. So we need to focus on this and say, listen, even if everything's gone bad this week, this month, this year, I'm celebrating the fact that at the end we win. I'm associated with Christ. My sins no longer assail me. So I want you to think of that. But I also want you to think of this. That when we celebrate the Lord's Supper



you should never celebrate it by yourself, you shouldn't celebrate online right now in your house, you should not be celebrating out at some camp. You celebrate it when the church comes together. Five times in First Corinthians 11 you celebrate the Lord's Supper when we come together as a church. And you know the problem Paul had with the Corinthian church when they came together for the Lord's Supper? They were factional. They were fighting. They were clicks. He says, stop it. Even when they celebrated the Lord's Supper they couldn't do it on common ground. They were edging each other out. The rich people were doing stuff and the poor people were excluded. And he says, stop it. There's one thing that happens when we celebrate a big victory, like the victory of our sins being appended to the cross and being removed from us as far as the east is from the west. You know what we do? We start to draw together. We should at least.

Remember that statue when you go down to San Diego and you see that sailor kissing the nurse, you've seen that, right? It comes to that famous photo in Life magazine after the war. That took place on August the 4th, 1945, in Times Square. And it's a weird picture when you think about it. Some people even protest, oh, there's like a, you know, assaulting a woman. Groan. Whatever. It is weird because if you learn the story about it, even you can hear interviews from the sailor. He's kissing a nurse he didn't know who she was. Do you think that's weird? His girlfriend was standing next to him just out of frame. He tells the whole story. And what prompts a man to kiss a stranger? It doesn't take much. You know men. (audience laughing) But here's the thing, though. How in the world? Here's what he says in an interview. The reason I kissed the nurse is I watched those nurses care for these injured soldiers and sailors. I was just so grateful. And why? The streets were erupting in celebration and jubilation. Right? And the girlfriend you think is going to dump the guy, right? She becomes his wife of, like, 50 years. Right? He's jubilantly celebrating the end of the war. I'm not saying he was a Christian, I'm not saying he was thanking God, but what it did for relationships horizontally, right? It drew them together. And I just got to say this. The Lord's Supper is that. We're gathered together to remember our victory that was purchased on the cross by Christ. But please remember this: it's supposed to pull us together. So I'm going to give you two minutes, three minutes just to pray to God. I want you to think about this vertically. Right? If you got unconfessed sin. Confess it. But I also want you to think, as Jesus said in the Old Testament arrangement, if you have a sacrifice you're about to bring to the Lord and you know that there's a problem with your brother, go fix it. In your heart right now at least fix it. How are we going to accept the forgiveness of God when you're not going to forgive your brother? I'm hoping there are not a lot of clicks and problems relationally in our church, but to what extent there are, we need to fix it right now. We celebrate the Lord's Supper because we're all on equal footing before Christ. And by God's grace, we celebrate our forgiveness together. Our sins are removed from us. What a great thing. Love each other and thank the Lord. Fear him and be humble. And in that humility, let's forgive each other. Make sure we're on the same page. All right. You spend three minutes at least talking to the Lord, and I'll come back up. We'll take these elements at the same time.

Talking about generosity after victory, I can't help but think of the book of Esther that we read not too long ago. They not only gave gifts to God, which I think is primary, but they gave gifts to each other. I just think the generosity is such a mark, or even as First John 3 says, of our



sincerity of our love. If you love God you're going to be generous to God, generous to the Levites in the Old Testament, generous in the worship center for us, generous to the church, generous financially to the things of God that would operate here. But you're also going to be generous to each other. We ought to be the most generous people. You say, "We don't have much." One of the reasons we don't have a lot often is because we don't have the priorities of the Lord. If we don't have priorities of the Lord if we don't care for each other, we aren't generous with each other. Right? The promise of God supplying seed for the sower is because he's seen people being generous.

And I think all of that stems from the right motive. And the right motive is look at what God has done for us. Look at what the Lord has done for us. And among those who fear the Lord, we want to say it as much as we can. I hope that even this sermon and the focus on victories ending with the ultimate victory that Christ secured for us, is something that just brings joy to your life, makes you happy. It doesn't matter how bad it's been, it's a good thing to think through the victory that we have in Christ. Either that or it's all a joke. If it's a joke, let's go home, let's play golf on Sunday morning, go to brunch, do something else. Right? But if this is real, if Christ rose from the dead, this is everything. This is central. What kind of priority should this be in our life? It's the center of our lives that we celebrate the fact that Christ died and spilled his blood on a cross to forgive us. We draw together, care for each other and we thank the Lord with humility and fear. "It's a terrible thing to fall in the hands of living God." We fear what he's going to do to a lost world. We fear for them, but we also fear our Father, who we know will look at our lives and evaluate us. We live with a great awe and respect. We "worship him in reverence and awe" to quote that passage in Hebrews 12. So I hope if your trust is in Christ, this has resonated with you this morning that you with me would eat this bread and drink this cup.

Why don't you stand with me and I'll dismiss you with a word of prayer? God, I hope it wouldn't be an abrupt changing of gears here to go from thinking about our victories, which might have taken our minds to a lot of little things in our lives, to the biggest thing as we celebrate the Lord's Supper of your Son being sent to die for us. Just an amazing thought that he would suffer what we deserved. And now to be recipients of your grace to have all of our transgressions appended to his cross, that we're forgiven. What a good thing that is to be for us just to celebrate with gratitude. So, God, we do want to celebrate. We'd like to celebrate every day something, some great expression of your faithfulness, your mercy, your goodness to us. Every good gift comes from you. We ought to see that. God, I pray we lift each other up their "drooping hands or feeble knees" as Hebrews says. I just pray that we would encourage each other and lift each other up. Let's be generous. Let us take someone to lunch or spend some time this afternoon to just open up our homes, or whatever it takes to show that we are humble recipients, grateful recipients of the blessings of God and the ultimate blessing of being forgiven. Thanks for this team. Thanks for our church. I'm so grateful for these people. Thank you God, bringing people to our church, doing such good things among us in our lives. May we celebrate those and discuss them in small groups this week. Just make this a good week of us pulling together to focus on things we all have in common, our salvation that has been purchased through your Son. Thank you so much for that.



In Jesus name, Amen.