

Psalm 84

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 October 2010

Preacher: Alex Cowie

- [0 : 0 0] And that's on page 526. Page 526. And we may just read from the beginning to remind ourselves of where we've come from.
- How lovely is your tabernacle or your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts, Lord Almighty! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord.
- My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young.
- Even your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God! Blessed are, happy are those who dwell in your house. They will still be praising you, Selah.
- That's considered. Blessed is the man whose strength is in you, whose heart is set on pilgrimage.
- [1 : 0 8] And our text is found in that verse, verse 5. Blessed is the man whose strength is in you, or blessed is the man whose strength is in you, whose heart is set on pilgrimage.
- Now we've been thinking about this in terms of the happy people. We saw that in verse 4, or verses 3 and 4. And today we want to continue in this thinking about the happy people.
- And by that, of course, we mean the truly happy people. We're not suggesting for a moment that people can't be happy without the Lord. They can be happy, but they are not truly happy.
- That's the point. And we know very well, all of us, that people try to find happiness in all sorts of things and people, in all sorts of interests.
- Some people are happy making money. And then they get to the point where they've made their millions, and they realise they are not truly happy at all.
- [2 : 2 0] I listened to an interesting discussion on Radio 4 when I was travelling between visits. And it was about the wife of a multi-millionaire who had made his money on the stock market.
- And she talked about how happy they were to be making their millions. And they had these lavish parties, to the extent that the caviar was in buckets and overflowing.
- And the champagne was just in huge supply. And she said this. She said, we thought it would make us happy.
- But it made us miserable. And of course I said to myself, well to the Lord, Amen. Because at least she discovered that. She went on to say a lot more, which we haven't time for.
- But I make the point that people try to find happiness in all manner of ways. But it's not true happiness to be happy without the Lord, the Saviour.
- [3 : 2 9] What he's saying here is, happy are those whose strength is in you, whose heart is set on pilgrimage.
- Now of course, although the Lord's people are truly happy. It doesn't mean they themselves always feel happy. The truth is, we sometimes feel far from happy.

But you see, true happiness is not about how we feel. It's about the relationship we have with God that he has made. There are times that trials of life, the difficulties that come at us like great sea billows, like the storms, make us feel very unhappy.

Sometimes, if you're like me, you're a bit prone to mood swings. And when you're in a down mood, you don't feel happy.

You're looking at all the dark and gloomy things. But true happiness, I say again, is not about how we feel.

[4 : 44] It's about a relationship which the Lord Jesus has made for us in him. And you see, in the early verses we looked at last time, the person who is truly happy can say, because of what God has done, my King, verse 3, my King and my God.

Now here in verse 5, the psalm writer goes on, speaking by the Holy Spirit, to develop the subject of the happy people. And he expands on what goes into the happiness.

And he shows us here that they are really happy whose strength is found in the Lord alone, who are empowered by him, who know what it is when they are weak to be made strong.

And that has been the experience of the Lord's people down through the long centuries. I was thinking when we were singing about Abraham, you're going to weigh back thousands and thousands of years to the days of Abraham.

And he found his strength in the Lord. That's the story of the people of God. Their strength is found in the Lord alone.

[6 : 07] It's not the strength that people summon up within themselves. Some of you will know that, perhaps you all know that the Tour de France is on just now.

I'm not a big fan of the American cyclist. But I've read his book, and I hope I've learnt a few lessons from it.

He's a man with a tremendous ability, Lance Armstrong I mean, He's a man who has a tremendous ability to focus. Incredible ability to focus and strengthen.

See what the word I'm using? And strengthen himself and get on with it. And perhaps there's a lesson or two to be learned from these folk, how they summon their energies.

But that's not enough to walk in the way of God and to walk the path of obedience to the Lord.

[7 : 11] It's not enough for coping with the spiritual forces that are real although they're unseen. We need strength from God. The strength of the most focused athlete.

The strength of the stoic person, of the person who just says, I'll get through. You know the expression, can this or that.

I'll make it. No, no. The truly happy person has this experience again and again, and that when he is weak, the Lord makes him strong.

So I want to think first of all, and briefly, about divine strength brings us into God's household, into the family of God.

And it's interesting that along the way of the Bible's history, you get what I'm about to quote again and again. Moses said it first, the Lord is my strength and my song and salvation.

[8 : 20] Isaiah says it too in Isaiah 12. And it recurs in the prophets, the Lord is my strength, my song, my saviour.

And here, in this passage, we're thinking about the Lord as the one who gives strength to his people.

Blessed is the man whose strength is in you. That is in the Lord of hosts. Verse 3. You must remember the connection.

And you see, the interesting thing here is that it's all about relationship to him. He brings us into a relationship with himself.

And he strengthens us in that way. And the great word of the Bible, of course, is he establishes his covenant with us.

[9 : 23] He not only gives himself to us, but he brings us to himself. He unites us to himself by giving us that trust in him.

And he is faithful in bringing us to himself. And the psalm writer is talking here about how he does that by his great strength.

He brings us into his household. He makes us part of his people. The reason, the chief reason we were singing in Psalm 65 is that there's a verse there in verse 4.

Blessed or happy are those you cause to approach you that they may dwell in your house. And we saw last time, this is not about just simply about a church building or some other worship place or the temple as it was in Jerusalem.

No, no, it's about living stones in a living temple being brought into that spiritual house of God that he's building for himself. And in the psalm we were singing, blessed or happy is the man you cause to approach you.

[10 : 45] And this is a very important point because in that verse the verb that's used you cause to approach is a very precise translation of the Hebrew we call it a causative.

And it is used there God causes us to approach him and he brings us in to his household.

And you see that sometimes God's grace, God's free favor to us, God being generous to us simply because he wants to be generous to us is described as giving us strength, empowering us.

And that's the way it's used here. Happy is the man whose strength is in you. In other words, who is empowered by you.

Now, that's not only something that's found in the Old Testament in the Hebrew Bible, it's found in the New Testament as well. And it's found in relation to the work of Jesus on the cross.

[12 : 06] In Romans 5 and verse 6, Paul the Apostle tells us when he's talking about the love of God in Jesus, he says, when we were without strength, when we were powerless, Christ died for us.

And when we believe that, we believe it because we are empowered by God to believe it. And we should take heart, we should be encouraged by that.

What he's saying is, we were totally enabled to bring ourselves to God, to believe the report, but God exercises for us his own goodness and his mercy, and he empowers us to lay hold of the truth.

We were singing in the opening psalm, let the heart rejoice that seeks the Lord, and we seek him because he empowers us to do that.

Oh, happy then is the person whose strength is in you, Lord. God. But not only does divine strength bring us into the household of God, it keeps us in the household of God.

[13 : 38] This is important, and it's very encouraging to us. It's a matter of thanksgiving. Anyone who knows his or her own heart and the influence of sin in our lives, the power of sin, will know that it's easy for us to become careless and drift away from the things we know.

And you see, the very fact that God gives strength to his people, he empowers them, is a reminder to us that he gives us that power to keep going, to go on, not to give up and turn back.

the great problem of many of the Israelites in the days when this psalm was written and before it, is that many of them faithlessly turned back.

They did not believe nor trust in God. They did not rely upon the strength he would give. and we are to see this as something that rather is here to encourage us.

Yes, we are in danger of going back from him. Yes, we are in danger of letting other things come in and we try to find happiness in them. But we have this assurance from God.

[15 : 13] His divine strength will not only bring us into his household, unite us to himself, but it will keep us going on.

It will keep us going on when our own strength fails, our own resources, our own abilities can't keep us going, when we can't cope with life and its difficulties.

We probably don't hear enough nowadays in the church from the pulpit. We don't hear enough about the spiritual warfare. When we are brought in by God's empowering of us, our strengthening of us, into his family, into his household, we begin to know the reality of a spiritual battle.

Peter talks, the apostle talks about Satan as that old serpent devil, who is like a roaring lion. He's out to devour us, he's out to gobble us up, he's out to take us back.

And we haven't the strength to overcome him. I remember years ago, reading in, some of you will remember Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the great Welsh preacher, who had been a Harley Street physician, and he gave it all up, and became a minister of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 49] And I remember in his study on the Christian warfare, how he emphasized the terrible power that the devil has, and how we must rely upon the strength God supplies.

It's strength to keep us going. It's strength to enable us to overcome. If you think about it for a moment, all the way down through the history of the people of God, as we have it in the Bible, even the great men of faith, they fell, they sinned, they came short, they did the wrong thing at times.

they had these crashes in their experience. Whether it was Abraham in Egypt, or Moses, remember Moses at Kadesh when the people were like to kill him because there was no water, and he struck the rock in a fit of rage.

Or King David, whom God talks about as a man after his own heart, when he had a crash, more than one, and a whole list of sin came from it, they would have been utterly swept away into eternal ruin, were it not for the blessed fact that God kept them, he strengthened them, else they would fall away.

And my dear friends, that is the story of countless Christians down through the ages in all parts of the world. How do we account for the martyrs in Rome and their emperor Nero, that were fed to the famished lions?

[18 : 55] How do we account for the people who died all over the world? They were all over the world, the Lord who gave them strength to believe on Jesus, gave them strength to go on, and to die while it was the will of God, for Jesus' sake.

God comes, and to God comes, and to you know, sometimes when in our own situation, sometimes it's when we crash, when we fail, when we go wrong, and we feel shame, and we feel that we've made a mess of it.

Right there when we are weak, God comes, and gives us strength, and lifts us up, and enables us to sing his praise.

How many times have we experienced this very thing, that the wonder of the strength we received was in him alone?

He is able to keep us from utterly falling away, and that should be a source of encouragement, to bring us into his spiritual household, and family, to keep us in that family, and household, to keep us going on.

[20 : 33] But the last thing, the third thing I want to consider, is divine strength has to be used in house.

Divine strength has to be used in house. It's got to be used, or we're in trouble. We sing it ourselves here in the psalm, I will go on in the strength of the Lord God.

But so very often we live as if we're not going on in the strength of the Lord God at all. We, at a practical level, don't avail ourselves of the strength he gives.

If you think about it for a moment, think about the knowledge you have, obviously I'm conscious, I don't have this knowledge, but there's many places in the Bible where you can look in the history of the Old Testament of Israel, that the great people of faith were told be strong and of good courage.

And the reason they were told that by God is they were weak and lacking in courage. And sometimes you get the psalm writer saying, you answered me in the day when I cried to you and you strengthened my fainting soul with strength.

[22 : 17] Why did the psalm writer write that? Speaking by the Spirit. Because he was like that, he was fainting, he was like to stop and finish and go back.

And the Lord came to him and spoke to him, be strong, you strengthened me with your word and I became strong.

That's the way he does it. He brings the word to bear upon us to strengthen us. But you see the point? We have to avail ourselves of that strength in-house.

there are two sides to this divine strengthening. It brings us in, it keeps us in.

These things are true, but it is not contradictory to say we must use the strength that's there. Actually, in Corinthians, Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he tells the Corinthian believers, do not receive the grace of God in vain.

[23 : 36] And what he means is don't receive the grace of God, the strength he supplies, in an aimless way. Use it or lose it.

Use it or lose it, and if you lose it, you'll just be in trouble all through your life. We need the strength he supplies, but we need to avail ourselves of it.

He wants us to do that, that we'll prove him again and again, that is, that the strength he gives will keep us going.

When Paul talked to the Philippians from prison, you remember it was a letter he wrote when he was in prison. He told them, you've got to work out your own salvation.

Okay, you've been brought in by the strength God gave you, and you're kept in the household, but he said you've got to work at it. With fear and trembling, seeing as how God is at work in you, you've got to get on with it.

[24 : 45] You're not to go back. You're not to, as it were, be like somebody who's stuck in the mud. You're to work at it.

The strength is supplied to enable us to manage daily. If we're going to progress, we need to rely on that strength.

You think about Paul himself. The whole catalogue of things he experienced at the hands of his own Jewish people who tried to shut him down.

The persecutions he experienced. He was even stoned and left for dead. What enabled him to go on but the strength the Lord supplied, and he made much of using it.

And it's important to do that. those who have their eyes set on pilgrimage, as it says here, who have an eye on heaven and heavenly things, and who have heaven in their hearts, must use the strength that God supplies.

[26 : 05] Happy is the man whose strength is found in you. And you see, God gives us rules for the road, and we've got to use them.

That's what he gives them to us for, that we might use them, that we might be the better of using them. Divine strength has to be used.

And when we're using it, then we're paying attention to the rules for the road to heaven. The words, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. That's not just about trotting away up to Jerusalem.

That's the picture. That's the picture the psalm writer uses, because that was the day he lived in when he spoke by the Spirit. But the real heart of it is, it's the pilgrimage, it's the journey through this world to heaven.

To be with Christ. And for that journey, we need to use the rules of the road in the Bible. We're to see them as important.

[27 : 21] The highway to heaven is the way of holiness. That's what the Bible tells us. It's the way of holiness. You'll be very aware, like me, of some of the celebrities just now saying all sorts of horrid things in order to back up their own lives and morality.

And they're not judging between holy and unholy, between clean and unclean. people. And if they knew the highway rules, the rules of the king, they wouldn't be speaking the way they are.

They're not using his rules. rules. No, no. We're to use the rules. We're to avail ourselves of the strength to use the rules for the way.

If our heart is set on pilgrimage, there are many things we have to leave alone, many practices we have to turn from. Why? Because of the book of rules the king of heaven has given us.

The highway to heaven, the way of our pilgrimage is a way of holiness and we're to walk in it. The New Testament is the same teaching.

[28 : 54] We're told by the apostle, if you live by the spirit, by the spirit who strengthens you into the household, who keeps you in the household, who enables you to use the strength, if you really do live by the spirit, then walk by the spirit.

Don't be indulging in the rules of the world, in the morality of the world, but use the rule book.

That's there for those who walk and whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. And you see, we're to keep this before us so that we are drawing daily upon the strength to set our hearts more and more on the highway to heaven.

and there's no loss in that. Other people may say, oh, well, look at you having to give up and not do and all the rest. Not a bit of it.

May we find it in our hearts that they really are set on pilgrimage, that our hearts are desiring more and more to be where Christ is, which is far better.

[30 : 27] And nothing should matter more than having the divine strength to bring us into the household of faith, to keep us in that household and to enable us in-house daily to rely more and more on that strength.

Let our hearts then be set on pilgrimage. This is where true happiness consists.

Blessed, happy are those whose strength is in you and whose hearts are set on the way of holiness and on the journey towards the heavenly home.

Amen.