

The Lord is My Strength

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[0 : 01] Let's turn for a little to the psalm that we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm 28. I want us just to look at this psalm in general, but maybe we'll read at the beginning and at the end just to, we'll have a look at it.

To you, O Lord, I call my rock. Be not deaf to me, lest if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary.

Then at the end, the Lord is the strength of his people. He is the saving refuge of his anointed. O save your people, bless your heritage, be their shepherd and carry them forever.

These psalms here, Psalm 26, and although they're all psalms of David, but Psalm 26, 27 and 28 really belong to a little collection together because there are themes running through them.

And one of the themes that is hinted at in all of them is the fear of being cast away. That is a real fear that the Christian can have. It might sound a strange thing sometimes when you say to yourself, how can a Christian, how can somebody who is born again, somebody who has been saved by grace, somebody who has been pardoned and forgiven and received by God and has all the great promises within the word of God, assuring them of God's love to them and of God's hold upon them, where the Lord has said that you will never be cast or taken out from his hand. How can it be that you can sometimes fear and tremble and fear of being cast away? Well, very simply because we're human and our thoughts, remember, are not going to be perfect thoughts all the time. We are sinners. We don't always do everything that is right. There's not one of us from the day that you've come to faith in the Lord Jesus

[2 : 33] Christ, that you could ever hold up your hand and say, you know, everything that I've ever done since I've become a Christian has been correct. I have never sinned in anything that I have done. And similarly, you could never say, I have never sinned in anything that I have said, that all my words have been true and perfect. And similarly, we know that our thought life can be just an explosion, a minefield sometimes of corruption. And if that is true, which it is true, then it is inevitable, but that sometimes our thoughts from a heart that is deceitful and desperately wicked will be thoughts that won't lay hold on the fullness of what God actually says to us. Where there will be elements of doubt will creep in. When we look at ourselves and our own failings and failures, we sometimes will come to the persuasion and conclusion. Yes, I know the Lord will save his people. I know that.

But then you, the way the logic begins to work. But if I am what I am, and if I think the way I do, and if I speak the way I sometimes do, and if I do the things that I sometimes do, am I really one of the Lord's people? And so there can be these, these thoughts will go through a person's mind. Because we see it as something that went through the mind of David. And David, as we know, was a man after God's own heart. And David prays. If David wasn't, if David didn't think like that, he would not have written where he says that I would become like, he says, do not be deaf to me, lest I be like those who go down to the pit. Do not drag me off with the wicked with the workers of evil. So he's saying to the Lord, please don't let that happen to me.

So David wouldn't be praying like that if he didn't think, as it was within himself, that he could, that that is something that could happen. And yet this is to David who is saying, the Lord, just a wee two or three psalms before, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

It is a psalm of so much assurance. But we know that David lived on an edge for years. The David who was so persuaded that he was going to be king, who had some times when we read in 1 Samuel there about his exploits and into 2 Samuel, and particularly when he was being hounded by Saul, and yet he would, he was displaying the most wonderful faith in God, and yet another stage he would say, there is but a step between me and death. One day I'm going to die at the hands of Saul.

He would come out with these expressions. So David was human, and so are we. And that is why we sometimes have these thoughts, these dark thoughts. What if, what if, what if I fall short?

[5 : 37] What if I don't make it? What if? And so it's one of the themes that runs through these psalms. There's moments, and we thank the Lord that that's, that's why the psalms are so, so precious, because we, we can identify, the psalmist will take us always to where, where we are. You, you won't often find, or you might never be in an actual situation where the experiences, whether they're high or whether they're low, whether you're in the heights or you're in the depths, but you will find something of where you are in the psalms. That is why they are so, so precious to God's people. And so David is there when he's saying, when he's saying that I, I become, don't let me become like those who go down to the pit. That is not speaking so much of the grave there.

It is speaking of God's judgment, of those who are going to come under the judgment of God. And when David then says, do not be deaf to me, lest you are silent to me. And of course, deafness and, and silence go together because if a person doesn't hear you, then that person's not going to answer you. So that's really what David is saying. I please Lord, hear me. Don't be deaf to me because if you're deaf to me, then you're not going to answer me. And so there's this urgency within the psalmist here. And then David prays and he says, he uses the word, and you'll find this is again, it's probably the word that is used for God more than any in the Bible is the word Jehovah, which means Lord. And that word Jehovah speaks really about God as being the self-existent

God, the independent God, the unchanging God, the everlasting God. And that's how David does at the beginning. He's really saying to you, Oh Lord, to you, the self-existent God, to you, the independent God, not dependent upon any other, to you, the God who never changes, to you, the God who is from everlasting to everlasting, I call. And do we have that awareness when we come in prayer before God? And when we say, Oh Lord, help me, do we realize that this is actually who we're speaking to?

The God who is not dependent upon any other for who he is. He is self-existent. He is from eternity with no beginning, with no end, always and ever the same. All power, all authority, all dominion, all glory belongs to him. And it's the most incredible privilege that we have when we come, even as we're doing this morning, as we come and we sing his word, as we read his word, as his word becomes part of our life, we enter into it. And even as we're reading this, these, as we've, as we've been singing, these words that we sing, we're expressing to him. And I think sometimes we forget or we don't appreciate just what it is we're doing, who it is we're engaging with. He is a God who can do all things. He is an authoritative control. Sometimes when we look out in this world and we see this world in upheaval and we wonder what's going to happen. There are times maybe we say that it can't go on like this. Well, at one level it can't. And there's going to come a day when the Lord is going to say, that's it. He knows when that point is going to be. Just as with the old world before the flood, when God looked down and he saw that every imagination of man was evil, that every thought that he was thinking was evil. And God said, I'm going to destroy this world. But Noah found grace in his sight and Noah and his family were saved. We know that that's going to happen again, not by flood, but by fire. God has promised that, that the world is going to burn with a fervent heat.

And so God knows when that time is going to be. But the thing is that although we might look out and see chaos and uncertainty, and there is, God is still in authority of control. He still rules and reigns until he puts all his enemies under his footstool. And so David is crying to the Lord here. And the great thing he says, to you, O Lord, I call my rock. That's who God is for David. He is my rock. A rock in a person's life is a wonderful thing. And you know, quite often you'll hear people when there's been a bereavement within the family. And whether a person has lost a husband or lost a wife or lost a member of family, often they will say, you know, he or she was my rock. And what they're saying is absolutely true. And sometimes they will actually say, I didn't realize how much a rock they were in my life. It's when that person is taken away. There's not just the sense of sorrow, but the sense of isolation and emptiness and a feeling of becoming so vulnerable, a vulnerability that they were never conscious of before. And they were saying, you know, that person, he or she was such a rock within my life. And that is perfectly true. But David is saying, I've gone beyond looking. I, my, my, my ultimate rock is beyond any human. David had many wonderful relationships in this world, but he's looking beyond all human relationships to the supreme relationship in Jesus Christ.

[12 : 21] And he is saying, the Lord, he is my rock. The one that I am grounded on, the one who, my feet are upon him to give me stability and direction in my life. He is the rock to shelter me.

You know how sometimes you can, if you're out and there's a fearful shower or something like that, and the wind is driving, all of a sudden, you might go and, if there's a, if there's a rock, try and get a bit of shelter under it. A rock is a shelter. A rock is a shield. It's a protection.

It's solid. It's strong. And David is seeing that. And this is the, this is the Lord that he's calling to. And he is saying, you are my rock. That's what he said of Psalm 40. He took me from a fearful pit, from the mighty clay, and he set my feet upon a rock. And you know, when your feet are set upon the rock, then your way is established. Is that true for you today? Are you able to say, you know, my feet are upon the rock that is Christ. And as you look back over your life, you have been assured that your feet are on the rock Christ, because you're saying, if it weren't for that, my feet would have slipped. I would have gone. If it weren't for the fact that I am in Christ, and my feet are upon Christ, I would have slipped away. But I've been kept. Because underneath, there is this, underneath, sometimes I feel I'm sinking. But you know, I can't sink all the way down. Because under the, all the sort of the sogginess that's here first, it's solid underneath. And that's how it is when we're, when we're rooted to Jesus. Now again, in these Psalms, there is also the feature that appears of God's house. We find that in Psalm 26. And when the Psalmist approaches God in his house, what the Lord is doing is he is searching to see the sincerity of the Psalmist. That he is, that there's this integrity within him. I wash my hands in innocence, and go round your altar,

O Lord. I do not sit with men of falsehood, and so on. And he says, I have walked in mine integrity. So as he's come to the house, to the altar of the Lord, again, this is talking of the temple, he says, I wash my hands in innocence. So it's talking here of the sincerity.

And we've always got to remember that, that when we come to worship God, God searches our hearts. And he's looking, he tries us. Because it's actually a very, as we say, tremendous privilege coming into the presence of God. But it's also a very solemn responsibility. Because we are in the presence of the God, who is also a consuming fire.

[15 : 20] The God who searches us and knows every single thing about us. And it's, we cannot just, as it were, breeze in as we were, and not take time or stock of who it is we have come into the presence of, of what it is we are in doing, who we are engaging with. Because he's looking at us, he's examining us. So when we come into God's house, we should always come with a prayer in our heart.

Lord, please cleanse me from my sin. Because I'm now coming into, though our lives are lived in the presence of God, when we come to God's house, we come in a very special way. We're almost as it were, well, it's not almost, we are. We're separating ourselves from the rest of what is happening.

As it were, separating ourselves from the world into this place. All worshippers, as they engage in the public worship of God, are coming at a very special moment, in a very special way, into the presence of God. And so we should be saying, Lord, I know I'm a sinner. And I know I'm not what I should be. And Lord, as I walk in here, I'm so conscious. And it's very often when we come into God's house, we become so conscious of all that we've been. When we pick up God's word and we begin to read it. And when the silence of the place, where we are in worship, comes in upon us, sometimes we think, oh Lord, have mercy upon me. Forgive me for all I have been, even in this last week.

Of all the things that I've said, of the things that I've done, of the things that I've thought. Because sometimes this comes before us as we come into worship. And God wants us to do that.

So that we're able then to say, Lord, I know I'm not, I'm not a polished article. I'm not who, but here I am. And I've come to you honestly. And I'm telling you who I am. And I'm sorry for my sin.

[17 : 30] But I want, I want to engage with you. I'm telling you, Lord, what I, how, how it is. I'm telling you, Lord, how I feel. And you know, that's very important. You will find, you remember when Hannah, Hannah was in distress. What did Hannah do? She, she went, she went to the tabernacle. She went to meet to, to God's place. It's the same with Asaph. When he was in distress, he went to God's house.

And it's important for us too, when we're in distress of soul or what, that we come and we tell the Lord. That's what these people did. Hannah poured out her heart. Asaph poured out his heart to the Lord in his house, telling him how it was. Hannah went away a different passion. Asaph went away a different passion. Because God heard their cry. And he made them aware that he had heard their cry.

And that's why it's, it's so important, as we say, going back there, that we come and we're honest before God. And we tell him just how it is. And we will receive the blessing from that.

When, when, when we tell him just how it is. And again, Psalm 27 talks about God's house and the sanctity is a place that is where, where there's hiding from the enemy. When evildoers assail me and so on.

And the, the, the, you know, though I, an army and camp against me, my heart shall not fear. And he says, one thing I have asked for the Lord that I will seek after that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all my days. So on the one hand, you have David's life, as it were, under threat, danger. And then he said, but you know where I want to go? I want to go to God's house.

[19 : 20] That's a place of safety, the place of security, the place where the presence of God is. And, uh, it's one of the, one of the, the great things of, of God's house for the beauty of the Lord may be found. And in Psalm 28, it tells us here then in verse two, hear the voice of my pleas for mercy. When I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands towards your most holy sanctuary. And that's the, the idea that the Psalmist has. I'm lifting up my hands toward, towards your most holy place. And it's in God's house that God, you know, this is one of the things that, that God's people, if they're laid aside for any period in life, it's when you can't get to God's house. It's sometimes then that you realize just how important, how integral God's house was to your life. It's when you're shut away from it and your heart is there. And you will find that often in the Psalms and particularly in David's Psalms. There were times, because the, the, the, the worship of God was so important to David. And for many years of his life, he was a fugitive. He was an outlaw living with a price on his head, dodging about in the caves, hiding in the caves. I remember when, when I, when I, in Israel, I was only there the, the one time and by, down by En Gedi and looking up at all the rocks there. And it's just, it's just a, I wouldn't say an explosion of rocks, but it's just rocks. And you can see wee caves. And I was saying, well, that's, that's where David was hiding from Saul. It mentions that in the Bible and En Gedi. And my mind was picturing him there. He just dotted away, hiding amongst there. But while David was in these rocks, hiding, barely escaping with his life, as Saul and his troops were searching, probably going from cave to cave and over the, over these mountains, David's heart was saying, you know, if, if there's one place that I could get to right now, it would be to God's house.

There was this longing. My heart pants as the water brooks, just like the deer panting for water. And David was saying, that's, that's the way I am. Just, if I could just get to God's house, if I could just get there once more. And you know, when God's people are, are laid aside, so often there are times if you're too ill, you can't think about that. But if you're, if you're just, if you're recovering or you're, you're better, but you're just still not able to get there. There's this, just this desire, this longing, longing to get there.

And so that's why, again, the psalmist says, I enjoyed, went to the house of God, go up, they said to me. But here we have this picture of when I lift up my hands. Now, when, when you lift, now, it can be two pictures. One, when you lift up your hands, it can be in worship, it could be a sense of adoration, that you're just lifting your hands up and saying, Lord, I, there is nobody in all the world I love like you. But very often the, the picture of lifting up of hands is a picture of, if you're doing that, outstretching your arms, it's a picture of, help me, I need something. You will often see that when, maybe on the news, when there are refugees or there's been some humanitarian crisis and there's piles of people and all of a sudden food and supplies are being brought in and you'll see people, other hands outstretched, looking for, for aid, for help. Please put something into my hand, I'm dying.

And in a sense, there is an idea of this. Here is the helplessness of us as we come before the God who is able to help us. That's a great thing. When we come in here today, we come into the presence of the God who is able to supply all our needs. He is the God who provides for us. He is the God before whom we cry and say, Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner. It's like Jonah. Remember when Jonah was going down into the depths and he was going down, you know, some people have strange experience in this world. Some have unique experiences. Some people you say to yourself when you hear them talk, people give their testimonies and you hear them give their testimony. And you can follow a lot of what they're saying. But sometimes he'll go down another path. You say, well, I'm lost there.

Well, if Jonah was giving his testimony, I don't think too many would be able to follow. But you know, Jonah prayed from the belly of the fish down in the water. It must have been the most fearful person that he was in. Can you think of the heat and the slime and everything? It's the suffocating slime in the belly of the fish. And yet, while he was sinking down in the depths of the sea, in the fish, he tells us in his prayer that he says, I will look to your holy temple. Why?

[24 : 53] Because the holy temple was a place where the mercy seat was. It was a place where God was dealing with us. It was a place where atonement was being made. And Jonah knew that there was no other place in all the wide world where there was hope for him, where there was help for him. And we've got to remember that Jonah was living in disobedience. Jonah had run away from God. And yet, Jonah, although he had defied God and deliberately run away from God and refused to do what God had asked him to do, which means he was living in sin. His life was one that was living in sin. Yet, here he is in the depths and he calls to God because he knew his God. And he cries for mercy. And he cries that the Lord will deliver him. And that's exactly what the Lord did. And that's such an encouragement to us when these things happen. And so it says, when I lift up my hands towards your most holy sanctuary. But you know, the funny thing is that at the end of the psalm, it also tells us that although we lift up our hands to the Lord, the Lord is also reaching down his hands to us because it tells us in the very last verse, be their shepherd and carry them forever. And that's what you do with your hands. You carry whatever you're carrying. You do it. Although there are places that maybe in Africa, people carry things in their heads and so on. But normally when we carry something, we carry it in our hands.

And that's what the Lord is doing. The Lord who has an arm that's full of power. His hand is great in mind. He is a God who carries his people. And that's a wonderful thought. And the psalmist is here highlighting the importance of God's people to God. Save your people and bless your heritage.

You know, that's a wonderful thought. Now, when David says here, save your people and bless your heritage. Somebody might say, well, I thought you're already saved. Well, of course, we're saved by grace right at the very beginning. When a person becomes a Christian, we are saved. That's what God does.

That he saves us because by nature we're lost. That's what Jesus, you know, there are some people who were living in a day where even within churches where people tell the gospel, but they make out that everybody is saved. But Jesus said, I came because people are lost. If everybody was saved, there was no need for me to come. Jesus says, I came, what did he to do? To seek and to save those who are lost.

You know how we have, we today have, you'll see the search and rescue helicopter or whatever, and they're going out to search. Somebody's lost. Out it goes, and it can go by day or night. It's got the light shining, and there's this, we're anxious. Will this, will they find it? It's a wonderful provision that is made. But there's this searching, search and rescue, the ghost guard, all these, search and rescue.

[28 : 28] Well, Jesus is ultimate, the ultimate searcher and rescuer, because that's what he says. That's why I came from heaven to earth to seek out and to save those who are lost. And we thank the Lord that that's what he did. But that doesn't mean that we don't, that we stop asking to be saved. Because it goes back to what we were saying before. We're human. We're constantly failing. We come short before the Lord day in, day out. And so we need to cry to be saved. Not to be saved in the once and forever saving, where once a person has been converted, born again, regenerated, brought into a union, a personal union with Christ, the person can never be lost again. That's our great security.

However, as we say we're human, we live in a dangerous world, a sinful world. We're so full of sin within ourselves. Have you not, as a Christian, cried, Oh Lord, save me? Of course you have. It's a natural thing. It's one of the cries of grace. Lord, save me. Save me from myself. Save me from the situation I'm in. Oh Lord, have mercy upon me. You continue to do that. And so David is doing that. And it's encouraging when you see David, that that's what he's doing. We also do that as well. But David highlights that God's dealings with his people are different to those who are not his people. Do not drag me off, verse 3, with the wicked, with the workers of evil, who speak peace with their neighbors. See how deceitful they are. They're pretending to their neighbors that they're, oh, they're not very nice people and say, oh, I like you and all that. But underneath their hearts, there's just evil in their hearts.

Give them according to their works and to their evil deeds. Because, see what it says in verse 5, because they do not regard the works of the Lord or the works of his hands, he will tear them down and build them up no more. That's solemn. See what it's really saying there? Because people, they do not regard the works of the Lord, they never think of God or of what God does. They never think of the work of his hands, work of his hands, the creation, because that's what it tells us in Psalm 8, that when I look up into the heavens, which thine own fingers framed. It's not a wonderful thought. God, just the intricate way he brought everything into being. You know, we're like, it's almost like an artist. Now, of course, we know that God doesn't have bodily parts, like you and I do. But it's using this language to convey what God is doing, the intimate, intricate way in which he works. But the workers of iniquity, they never think about that.

They don't regard God. They never take time to think, isn't it amazing? When they look at the sun or the moon, they don't think about God. This world is full of those people who are giving their God-given abilities, not only not to think about God, but trying to remove a God consciousness from the very way of people thinking. There are brilliant minds at work, trying to convince people God does not exist.

Isn't that extraordinary? Isn't that terrible? But the Lord is saying here very clearly, because they do not regard the works of the Lord or the works of his hands, God is one day he's going to tear them down and build them up. No more. No more. It's a very opposite to what will happen with God's people. Because there are times God's people will stumble and they will trip and they will fall, but that's not going to be the end of them. Remember what it says in Psalm 37, the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down. Why?

[33 : 00] Because the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. See, that's the difference between those who follow the Lord and love the Lord and the workers of iniquity. One will fall never to rise up again.

Those who are united to the Lord, though they fall, the Lord will lift them up again. So God has his people, as is described here as his heritage, or it could be also his inheritance. Now as you know, an inheritance is a title or a property or an estate that by law is passed from one person to another.

When a person dies, the inheritance, the property or the estate has been willed on to somebody else.

So, this is how it's looked here. That God's people are the inheritance. You see, the only thing that God is going to take out of this world, everything else is going to be burnt up. All he's going to take at his people. His people were given to Christ. They are his will. This is the will of God. This is his inheritance. And they will all be presented before. That's one of the things at the end that Jesus Christ will present to the Father. All his people. Here's your inheritance. Here they are.

Every single one of them. It's a wonderful thought. That's why God's people are so important and so precious to him. And sometimes we forget because again we look at ourselves and we say, can I really be that important and that precious to God? Because sometimes we put down on ourselves so much and we sometimes forget, God really, really loves me. And all we have to do is look at the battered, bleeding, bruised Savior on the cross who's crying, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[35 : 22] To look there and say, that's how much God loves me. That's what he did to his own son rather than do it to me. Everything he has done to his son there was because of me and means that he will never do that to me because he's done it to his son for me. It's the most amazing display of love.

God says to us because of what Jesus has borne for you. You're free. You are precious in my sight. I love you. I can't wait.

Remember, that's the word of Jesus in the high priestly prayer. Father, I will that those whom you've given me will be with me where I am that they may behold my glory. Jesus is longing for the day.

When all his people will be at home with himself. We mourn when our loved ones are taken away. There's no mourning in glory. It's the fulfillment of Jesus's prayer. Before he went to the cross, oh, Lord, I can't wait for the day when they'll all be together with me, with you, in glory.

What a thought. What a prospect. Sometimes we forget just how much God loves us. But here we see in this psalm, the psalmist is saying, and what a great way to finish.

[37 : 00] Lord, bless us. Lord, save us. Lord, shepherd us. Lord, carry us. Because that's one of the things as well. The Lord, he shepherds us.

Shepherd feeds. A shepherd is somebody who feeds and guides and looks after the flock. That's what the Lord is doing for us. And he will continue to do. It's part of what goes on in heaven, where he will continually lead us and feed us in everlasting springs of water.

Shepherding of Jesus is one of the great, wonderful things of his work. So, pray, make that your prayer, that last, Lord, save us.

Or save me. Lord, save me. Lord, bless me. Lord, shepherd me. Lord, carry me. Carry me all the way home.

And you know, if the Lord is doing that for you today, you're the safest person in this world. It doesn't matter what might come your way. It doesn't matter what bruises or batterings you may have.

[38 : 07] If you are in the hand of the Lord and he's carrying you and he's shepherding you and he's blessing you and he's saving you, you are as safe as anybody can possibly be.

Let's pray. Oh, Lord, our God, we give thanks for who you are and what you're doing to us and what you're doing for us.

We give thanks, Lord, for your shepherding of us. We give thanks, Lord, that you carry us like on wings of eagles. We give thanks, oh, Lord, that you are blessing us and that we are your people.

Help us to understand even a little more just how precious and how wonderful that is. Lord, be gracious to us and guide us as we journey on through this world.

May you be a rock, a shield and a shelter. Take us to our home safely, we pray, and do us good and cleanse us from our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. We conclude singing in this psalm, Psalm 28, verses 8 and 9, the last two verses of the psalm.

[39 : 24] Verse 8, Psalm 28. Psalm 28.

Psalm 28. Psalm 28.

Psalm 28.

Psalm 28. Psalm 28.

Psalm 28. Psalm 28. Psalm 29.

[41 : 56] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.