

Relaxing into the Everlasting Arms

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[0 : 00] You've got a wonderful verse, wonderful verse. Have a look at it. Committed to memory.! By the end of the sermon this morning, I guess you'll know it off by heart. So if you say to yourself, I don't know many Bible verses, this is one you're going to learn today. The point of a motto text for me and for us is that this becomes a kind of theme, a kind of verse for the year. It says, the eternal God is your refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms.

If you live, if I live, in the power of that verse, if I live under its instruction every day, if I get up in the morning and say, do you know what? Today is going to be tough, but the eternal God is my refuge. Do you know what? Today I'm struggling to survive, but underneath are the everlasting arms. It'll make such a difference to every day.

We've had some wonderful answers to prayer in this last week. We gathered on Wednesday to give thanks to God for quite miraculous answers to prayer. But the thing I've learned about prayer, it's kind of the thing I learned about following Jesus and trusting in his precious blood.

The thing I've learned about this is that it's not so much that you ever get to the point where you can say, that's it, it's all done and dusted. All my prayers have been answered. All my problems are removed. All of the challenge is gone. That never happens. Not this side of glory.

But what does happen is that every day he's with me, every day he's healing me, every day he's helping me, every day he's cleansing me, every day he's supporting me. I live within the already and the not yet theologians. What is already true of us is that we're forgiven. We're justified. We're sanctified.

[2 : 18] We're glorified in Jesus. Already that's true. And yet, every day I need forgiveness. Every day I need to remind myself of the gospel that brings my justification. Every day I need to think about the glory that awaits. I live in the already and the not yet. It's a tension. But when my flesh dominates and when I am tempted to feel that I'm never going to make it, I need to remind myself of precious truths.

The eternal God is my refuge. And underneath, and I used to always say it like this, underneath and round about are the everlasting arms. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was walking through the countryside with a friend when he noticed a barn with a weathervane on the door, on the roof rather. And as part of the metal work, there was an inscription, God is love. And Spurgeon, walking with his friend, observed that he felt that the message was a very poor message and the object, sorry, the object was a very poor object for the message. He loved the message, God is love. But he felt the object was a poor object because he said, weathervanes are changeable, regardless of which way the wind blows.

God's love is constant. To which his friend replied, I don't agree with you, Charles. You misunderstand the meaning. That sign is indicating the truth, regardless of which way the wind blows.

God is love. Always love. No matter what the circumstances of our life, no matter how difficult things get, no matter if it seems not true because of what I'm experiencing, God is love.

The Lord appeared to us in the past, says Jeremiah, I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you with loving kindness. Now, sometimes Israel didn't feel that was true, but it didn't alter the reality of that truth. I have loved you with an everlasting love.

[4 : 43] Eternal truths, you see, they don't change, no matter the challenges and circumstances of our lives. And our motto text does not change. This is a reality for us all, for all who live in covenant with Almighty God. The eternal God is our refuge. He's your refuge. And underneath are the everlasting arms.

Now, in context, this is from Deuteronomy 33, and it has echoes of Genesis 48 and 49, when you might remember Jacob is saying goodbye. He's about to die, and so he's saying goodbye to his children, and he calls them all by name, and he gives them a special message from God, a prophetic message about them and their future. And exactly the same happens in Deuteronomy 33, but this time it's Moses.

It's his farewell sermon, or his farewell discourse, as it's known. And he's given a message to each of the tribes. They're about to enter the promised land, but he won't go with them. He can't go with them, because there was a time he got angry with them. He got frustrated. And because he got so frustrated and angry, and he started to complain and say, look, you've made life so very difficult for me.

He forgot that it was God that they were forsaken, not him. And so he kind of struck the rock in anger and so on. And God says, okay, because you've done that, you're not going to enter the promised land. But I'll let you see it. I'll let you see it before you die. And he's just about to do that.

But he gives this farewell message. And in the farewell message, he kind of announces certain things, but he calls them, interestingly, a word that is used only three or four times in the Old Testament. He calls Israel Jeshurun. And Jeshurun means upright ones. So he's kind of saying, you are the upright ones. You are the followers of the Lord. You have been faithful to him.

[6 : 49] But often when Jeshurun is used of Israel, it refers to them in terms of their unfaithfulness while lording the faithfulness of God. So Deuteronomy 32, 15, Jeshurun grew fat and kicked. Filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the rock his savior. And then in verse 5, he was king over Jeshurun when the leaders of the people assembled along the tribes with the tribes of Israel. And then the other reference, Isaiah 44 verse 2, this is what the Lord says, he who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you. Do not be afraid, O Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.

So yes, the upright ones, but unfaithful in their dealings with God. And yet God is saying to them, no matter how unfaithful you are, I will always remain faithful to you. You may abandon the terms of the covenant, but I will never abandon the covenant I have made with you, the house of Israel.

He will always remain faithful to his people. They were to discover that when they look back at their slavery in Egypt, and again when they will look back once they're in their land, in their journeys in the wilderness. And throughout their history, and even today, the nation of Israel can look back and give thanks to Almighty God for restoring them to their land in 1947 and continuing to keep them in covenant. But we heard this morning of new covenant, a new covenant in which Gentiles have entered and become part of the Israel of God. For Israel means they wrestle with God and prevailed. And we are all of us, if we belong to Christ, if we are part of his body, part of the new Israel of God. We are all in covenant together. And so covenant promises apply to us well, including this covenant promise. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Now think of how important it is for them to hear this. Moses is about to leave them.

They've known his leadership, and his leadership was very reassuring and comforting. You see, it's a bit like when Newcastle United play without Bruno Gamaris. I always fear we're going to lose.

Well, he's just a great player, Ken. Just keep up. He's our captain, you see, and when he doesn't play, we lose. It's kind of one of those quirks. When he comes on, you think, oh, great, we might have a chance, because his drive and his energy and his ambition. He's determined, he's committed, he's passionate.

[9 : 55] He puts it all on the line for the badge. And when you're a player with Bruno Gamaris, you think, oh, we're better off with him than without him. And that's something. It's a poor illustration, I get you, but nevertheless, you won't find it in many commentaries unless they're written by Geordi's. But nonetheless, Moses is leaving them. They're going to go into the promised land without his leadership. And they haven't known that for a long time, 40 years in the wilderness. Every crisis, he was there. When the whole thing was about to fall apart, he was praying. He was speaking to God on their behalf. Sometimes they were terrified of him when his face shone. Other times they were glad he was there. Without him, we might be defeated. Without him, we might lose. And so they're going into the promised land, and they've got no leadership. What shall they do? Ah, Moses says, you have a greater leader than I. For underneath and round about are the everlasting arms of the eternal God, who will never leave you or forsake you. And we need to hear that, don't we? Because we talked about

Wesley, and we talked about Brownfield, and here we are on Skinner Street. Brownfield married Rebecca Skinner, and we've got all of this history behind us, and then one day I'll be gone as well, and there'll be some other leadership of this church if God tarries. But what matters is not the man.

What matters is the eternal God in whom the men or the women trust. For what keeps us from falling is Almighty God, who is always underneath and round about. Praise His name. And so these are great truths, you see. Great truths that we have to keep to heart, and great truths for our lives.

I saw a teacher the other day when I went to Eve's parents' evening, and I hadn't seen him for a lot of years. And my first thought was, oh, he's aged since I saw him, which is not surprising, because I haven't seen him for 20-odd years. And then I thought, well, I've aged too.

But we chatted together, because he's a fellow Geordie and a fellow Newcastle supporter. We had a little chat together, and he said to me, oh, you're looking well. You're looking fit. I kind of wanted to say, what did you expect me to look like? But then I thought, well, you know, why am I looking well? I have to work hard at it. I have to work hard. I have to watch what I eat. I have to exercise. I have to kind of not take anything for granted. That's true. But at the same time, I am well, because the eternal God is my refuge. And underneath and round about the everlasting arms. I told you you were going to learn that verse. But here's a great truth about those words.

[12 : 59] Underneath, think about this. This first lesson, God's support isn't temporary. It's everlasting. That's a slide, by the way. There you go. Underneath and round about are the everlasting arms.

You know, when you're carrying a weight that is too heavy to bear, here, get hold of this. Just about able to be strong enough to hold it up. But life is full of weight that is hard to bear, bear. And sometimes too hard for me to bear. And sometimes too hard for you to bear. That's the reality of life. It hits us hard sometimes. And I'm really glad that when it's too hard for me to bear, underneath is God who upholds me. Campbell Morgan, in a quote here, it's on the slide.

When you have reminded yourself of that lowest level, So you might say, I'm really low and life is really hard. But lower than that is God to pick you up and to make you stand firm. And notice the word are. Underneath are the everlasting arms, the wonderful present tenses of the Bible. It's not were. It's not will be. It's are.

It is footsteps in the sand. It is looking back and realizing that there was only one set of footprints. And you say, Lord, why did you let me down when I needed you more? And he said, no, no, that was when I carried you. You just didn't know it. It says that in the Psalms, he made his way through the sea, but his footprints were not seen.

There's so much part of our life when we think, wow, I got through that in the skin of my teeth, when the reality is I got through that by the grace and mercy of Almighty God. But his footprints were not seen. And he's always in the R. He's always in the present tense. Why? Because he is the eternal God. And you know what eternity is? It is outside of time. It is the ever-present now.

[15 : 33] And when God announced his name to Israel, he said, I am who I am. Not I will be who I will be. I'm not going to improve. Not I was who I was because I was better then before I got old, a bit like me. I was better then before now because I'm diminishing. God never diminishes. He never grows old.

He never grows weary. He never gets weaker. He is always in the eternal I am. And that I am is always available to carry your weight. Thank God. So, what a promise for us as believers. When Moses was dying, he said to the people of Israel, in Deuteronomy 34, it says of him, Moses was 120 years old. That's a good age. That's older than Carl. And it's older than Mary. Carl's going to be 91. Are you, Carl? 90 coming?

90 coming? 90 coming? Yeah. And Mary, 90. How old are you now, Mary? 92. 92. Wow. Isn't that great? 182 between them. Well, what about Moses? He was 120 years old. Carl and I were talking the other day.

And he was saying, well, I'm getting old. You know, I'm doing well. I'm getting old. I said, yeah, you really are doing well, Carl. That's fine. And then, Carl, I went home and I read about George Muller. And you know, when he was 93, 93, Mary, older than you, he took up another pastorate.

93. No retiring in the kingdom of heaven. Moses was 120 years old when he died. Yet, listen to this, his eyes were not weak, nor his strength gone. He didn't die of old age. He died because it was his time. And then it says in verse 25, as your days are, so will your strength be also.

[17 : 39] And I said, Lord, for as long as I live, will you keep me strong so that even if I live an old age, by the grace of God, I'll be useful. I want to be useful.

Wonderful. Oh, Lord, uphold and strengthen me. George Muller said toward the end of his life when he took up his ministry at 93.

Oh, Lord, uphold and strengthen me. Carry me in your everlasting arms all my days, so that my strength will equal my days. Wonderful.

So, yes, God will be present with us. Also, God will protect us against all our enemies. We have our enemies. We're going to go into the promised land. They're going to attack us.

What will we do without Moses? God says, I'm with you. The eternal God is your refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms. And then it says, He will drive out your enemy before you see him. Destroy him.

[18 : 49] If God is for us, who or what can be against us, says the Apostle Paul? Nothing, not life, nor depth, not angels, nor demons, not things that are past or things that are to come, nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Why? Because underneath and roundabout are the everlasting arms. When it comes to our lives, how much easier it would be if when we face the challenges and struggles in our life, we live in the power of this Scripture.

If we get bad news from the doctor about our health, if we have struggles with our mental health or our physical well-being, if we have problems in our families or problems at work or problems just because of the nature of the world in which we live, we don't fear and we don't feel that our life is out of control and there is no solution.

If we remember, as A.W. Tozer said, with the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack?

You hear that? With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, which He does, with the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack?

[20:49] And so we close today by reminding ourselves of this text. Here is a truth and a reality for you and for me if we will trust Almighty God.

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Why not relax into the arms of Almighty God?

Amen. Just take a breath. Why not relax into the arms of Almighty God?

Amen.