From Strength to Strength

Psalms 84:5-7

Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. 6 Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. 7 They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.

Blessed is the man whose strength is in the Lord, the man who has the ways of God in his heart.

■ They travel from strength to strength.
■ They are on the move.
  ○ This Christian life is a journey and none of us has yet reached the destination.
  ○ There is no room to stand still and grow stagnant in your walk with God.
  ○ You may have strength for today but God’s not satisfied with leaving you there –
    ▪ He wants to move you from strength to strength.
  ○ You may be living in blessing right now but God isn’t going to let you get to comfortable there –
    ▪ He wants to move you ever closer to him,
      • ever nearer to the cross,
      • further along in your journey.

■ God is a moving god.
  ○ The scripture begins with God moving across the face of the deep.
    ▪ Genesis 1:1-2 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. 2 And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
  ○ God is constantly on the move.
    ▪ Creation reflects that truth
    ▪ We live in a universe that is constantly on the move.
    ▪ This rock called Earth is hurtling through space.
    ▪ Even when you stand still you are moving!
    ▪ Not just physically, but spiritually too.
  ○ God is constantly moving his people… from strength to strength.

No pain no gain.

■ I used to wonder how you go from strength to strength?
  ○ Or, to put it into other words, how do you move from blessing to blessing?
  ○ How do you go from Mountain Top to Mountain Top?
■ Then the door of understanding began to open…
  ○ If I’m on the mountaintop but God desires to move me to a higher mountaintop with a greater experience with him
I must travel from mountaintop to mountaintop…
To go from mountaintop to mountaintop you have to pass thru a valley.
  • In order to go from victory to victory there must be a battle.
Likewise, any weight lifter will tell you, the journey from strength to strength passes thru adversity…
  • Without an increase in resistance there is no increase in strength.
  • If one desires to become stronger they must make a conscious decision to face greater opposition.

Adversity
  ■ Adversity is at once the greatest blessing and the greatest curse of humanity.
    o It started in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve disobeyed God.
      ▪ Up until the judgment of God everything had come easy to Adam and Eve.
      ▪ The world that they lived in was in harmony with them, yielding its fruits without struggle.
    o But immediately when man entered into a sinful condition God introduced adversity to the mix.
      ▪ He said to Adam, you will toil and work to scrape out a living by the sweat of your brow.
      ▪ To Eve he said you will temper the joy of childbirth with the toil and labor of delivery.
        • Things are not going to come easy any more.
        • Anything worth having in your life is going to come to you thru the adversity.
        • You will have to work in order to achieve anything.

The blessing of Adversity
  ■ While adversity was a major part of the curse of sin, it also became a vehicle for blessing from God.
    o By the design of God, we gain from adversity.
      ▪ Adversity causes us to grow,
        • to increase,
        • to move from one level to the next.
  ■ God saw man in the pitiful condition that Sin left him in
    o and even as he pronounced judgment for sin he instituted a means for growth.
      ▪ The curse becomes a source of blessing.
  ■ The New Living Translation of James 1:2-3 puts it this way: “Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested your endurance has a chance to grow.”
    o It is adversity that provides us the opportunity to grow.
The trials and tests of this life may seriously challenge our faith

- but when they are done with us we emerge from them stronger
  than we were before we encountered them.

Strength

- This is the language of the Psalmist.
  - Blessed is the Man whose strength is in God.
  - The latter half of that verse is difficult to understand in the KJV
    translation but what it means is:
      - A man is blessed when his strength is in God and God’s ways
        are in his heart.
  - Here we find the source of the strength that the Psalm is addressing.
    - This is not a formula for bodybuilding.
      - Although our physical bodies are modeled after the same
        concept, the psalmist isn’t addressing the growth of muscles.
    - A man is blessed when his strength is in God.
      - We’re talking about a strength to believe,
        - a strength to obey,
        - a strength to endure…
      - We are talking about a spiritual strength.
    - You see, physical strength will let you down.
      - You can spend huge amounts of time, energy and effort
        developing the strength of this body,
        - but in the end you can never slow the hands of time.
        - Eventually this strength will fail you…
  - But BLESSED is the man whose strength is in the Lord.
    - You can only get so far on your own strength,
      - your human will can only carry you so far
    - The true source of blessing lies in learning to turn to God for your
      strength.

Spiritual strength

- This spiritual strength is coupled with the ways of God.
  - The blessed man, whose strength is in God will have in his heart the
    ways of God.
    - The doctrines, precepts, and promises of God will be deeply
      engraved upon his heart.
    - It is this relationship with God that fuels his strength.
  - All too often we struggle to understand God.
    - We want to know why we go thru this or why we face that.
      - When the key to true peace and spiritual strength lies
        **not in understanding God but knowing God.**
  - His ways are above my ways and his thoughts are above my thoughts
    - but if I can KNOW him I can TRUST him
- It’s this trust in the Lord that comes from knowing him that becomes the
  source of my strength.
From Strength To Strength

He passes thru the valley but makes it a place of rejoicing!

- Blessed is the man whose strength is in the Lord
  - Who has the ways of God in his heart
    - He passes through the valley of Baca and makes it a well.
  - The valley of Baca is a dry and barren valley – there is no water there.
    - The word Bacca means weeping – it is a dry barren valley of weeping.
  - It is the valley mentioned in Judges 2:1 which received its name from the weeping of the Jews, when they were rebuked for their disobedience to the commands of God.
    - It is a place of sorrow, a place of trial and testing.
  - He passes thru this valley of weeping but, in the barren place, he finds a well of refreshing.
    - The implication of the text is not that the blessed man makes the valley a well, but that he makes God his well!
      - The Psalmist is saying of the man that lives this blessed life of knowing the Lord
        - that he passes through the valley of weeping,
        - and in that dry and barren place
        - he makes the Lord to be his fountain of refreshing.

The valley

- There are two things that must be noted here:
  - First, there is no condition to entering this valley
    - It is a foregone conclusion,
      - the man whose strength is in God and who has the ways of God in his heart WILL pass thru the valley of weeping.
    - When Job faced his struggle his friends and counselors tried to convince him that his suffering had to be the result of some shortcoming in his life.
      - We discover, however, thru the course of the book that the opposite is true
        - It is his closeness to God, his walk with God, the led to his valley experience.
  - This gives rise to the second point, we know from the verse that we started with that God will move this blessed man
    - Whose strength is in God and who has the ways of God in his heart from strength to strength.
      - This valley of weeping is God’s vehicle of growth!
        - Trial becomes the incubator of faith.
      - The problem is that just like the friend of Job we get caught up in the why!
        - Why here? Why this?
• Why me? Why now?
  ▪ When the reality is that we should spend less time trying to understand God and more time getting to know God.
  ▪ That is where our source of strength is – in our knowledge of God.

The Response

■ The Psalmist gives us the proper response to trouble in our lives.
  o The blessed man turns to God as his source of refreshing.
    ▪ In a dry and barren valley where there seems to be no hope,
    ▪ no chance of survival.
    ▪ This blessed man turns to God.
  o This blessed man says, Lord my trust is not in this world.
    ▪ My hope is not in these physical conditions around me.
    ▪ Though it may be dry and barren on the outside – MY STRENGTH IS IN YOU!
  o This blessed man turns the valley of weeping into a place of rejoicing!
    ▪ When there’s nothing to rejoice about, he rejoices in the Lord.
    ▪ When there’s nothing to warrant praise,
      ▪ when his life is filled with trouble and trial,
      ▪ he lifts his hands to heaven and gives his praise to God!

■ In the dry and barren valley where there is no source of sustenance,
  o he turns to God and MAKES God his well!
    ▪ He responds to the valley of weeping by turning to the God that he knows.
      ▪ The God that is his source of strength.
      ▪ He makes a spiritual statement – it may be dry and barren on the outside
      ▪ But there are rivers of living water on the inside.

Watch how God answers that kind of attitude… The rain also filleth the pools.

■ Old testament travelers that found themselves crossing a dry and barren place, like the valley of weeping, would habitually dig pits anywhere they stopped.
  o The purpose of these pits was to provide a place to collect the rain from any quick shower that might come up in an instant but dissipate in a moment.
    ▪ This is what the Psalmist says, if you will make a place for God in your valley.
      ▪ If you will take the time to turn to God and make him your well…
      ▪ If you will dare to dig a pit of praise in your valley…
        ▪ God will answer with rain!
    ▪ Not just a quickly dissipating shower, but a long slow soaking that fills the pools.
      ▪ If you will make a place for God in your trial,
From Strength To Strength

○ He’ll provide you a blessing that you cannot contain!

From Curse to Blessing

■ That which was a curse, the adversity that sought to drag you down
  ○ Now becomes a source of strength
    ▪ That which was supposed to destroy you strengthens you instead.
  ○ This is the great understanding that Joseph came to in the 50th chapter of Genesis
    ▪ When he looked at his brothers and said of his captivity: you thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good
      • This thing that was supposed to destroy me, this trial that was supposed to sideline line me
        ▪ God used it to advance me.
      • To move me from strength to strength.

Don’t get lost in the process.

■ I come to you on this Memorial Day weekend with a simple message of encouragement.
  ○ Sometimes we get so caught up on the struggle that we find ourselves weak and weary
    ▪ we lose sight of the big picture
      • I’ve come to remind you that God is the Lord of your life.
      • That no struggle or temptation overtakes you that God isn’t aware of.
        ○ Your current struggle, the trial that currently confronts you
        ○ Was never meant by God to destroy you
  ○ But God has allowed this struggle into your life,
    ▪ he has directed your footsteps into the dry barren valley of weeping
      • in order to allow you to grow in your faith
  ○ It is not God’s desire that you wither and die in the valley, but rather that you discover the source of your strength.
    • If we never faced adversity that we couldn’t overcome on our own
      ○ We would be easily fooled into thinking we can do this thing on our own.
    • But God moves us from strength to strength
      ○ From victory to victory
      ○ From mountain top to mountain top
        ▪ Thru the valley of weeping.
  ○ It is in the night, when everything else fails, that we find the true source of our strength.
I’ve come today to admonish you to turn your eyes of faith back to God
  
  o It’s time to make a conscious decision in your dry barren valley to make God your well.
  
  ▪ It’s time to step out on faith, extend your worship to heaven and dig some pits of praise that the Lord can fill with a shower of blessing.

Some of the greatest inspirational quotes of all time came from the lips of Winston Churchill as he called a nearly defeated nation back from the brink of ruin to a position of victory in World War 2.

  o It was in those dark days after he assumed office,
    
    ▪ in the shadow of the defeat at Dunkirk that he uttered these words:
      • We shall draw from the heart of suffering itself the means of inspiration and survival.

  o This attitude set the tone for the reshaping of the British moral
    
    ▪ The devastating defeat of Dunkirk was followed by equally impressive victories in Italy
      • Ultimately the defeat at Dunkirk would be swallowed by the greater victory of overcoming the Axis powers.

  o The strength to accomplish this task came from a mindset that viewed suffering as a means of inspiration
    
    ▪ that saw defeat as the platform from which to launch a victorious campaign.

This valley is not going to be your final resting place.

  o It is merely the means of transition to the next mountain top.
    
    ▪ Why don’t you make up your mind today.
      • Here and now.

  o Though I sit in darkness – the Lord is a light around me.
    
    ▪ Though I find myself in a dry and barren place – He is a well of refreshing.

  o When I see no hope before me – I realize that my hope is in the Lord.
    
    ▪ It’s time for someone to declare:
      • I don’t see a good reason to rejoice in my life – but in my lord I find a cause for celebration!

  o It is time to see your suffering as an inspiration!
    
    ▪ I can promise you this – if you will dig the pools in your valley
      • God will send the rain.

This is Memorial Day weekend.

  o This weekend we celebrate the strength of our nation.
    
    ▪ The strength of freedom and liberty
    ▪ Lies in the hearts of young men and women who have determined that there is a cause, in this country, worth dying for.
In defense of liberty and freedom, they are willing to give all that they have to give.
  • We celebrate the ultimate sacrifice that has been made over and over again
  • And we are reminded that freedom isn’t really free.

On this Sunday morning service, I just wanted to take a moment and remind you where your strength comes from.
  o Your strength flows from your relationship with God!
    ▪ The strength to endure trials, the strength to overcome adversity
    ▪ It rises from the personal knowledge that you can trust God no matter where you are.
    ▪ It is faith that causes the weary pilgrim to stop in the valley of Bacca, that dry and barren place, and begin to dig a well.
      • With no hope of ever striking water, still a pit is prepared in expectation of the outpouring of a blessing.
      • This faithful traveler, in the dry valley of weeping, lifts his head expectantly towards heaven and watches for the cool refreshing rain.
        o Because time has taught him that his God will never forsake him!

Blessed is the man whose strength is in the Lord.
  o Today, why don’t you purpose in your heart to make God the source of your strength?!!