

Psalm 138, “Glorious Courage”
9/6/20 Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Pastor Alex Amiot

Psalm 138 (NKJV)

A Psalm of David.

- ¹ I will praise You with my whole heart;
Before the gods I will sing praises to You.
- ² I will worship toward Your holy temple,
And praise Your name
For Your lovingkindness and Your truth;
For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.
- ³ In the day when I cried out, You answered me,
And made me bold *with* strength in my soul.
- ⁴ All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord,
When they hear the words of Your mouth.
- ⁵ Yes, they shall sing of the ways of the Lord,
For great *is* the glory of the Lord.
- ⁶ Though the Lord *is* on high,
Yet He regards the lowly;
But the proud He knows from afar.
- ⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me;
You will stretch out Your hand
Against the wrath of my enemies,
And Your right hand will save me.
- ⁸ The Lord will perfect *that which* concerns me;
Your mercy, O Lord, *endures* forever;
Do not forsake the works of Your hands.

The writer of Psalm 138 has glorious courage. He says to the Lord in verse three, “In the day when I cried out, You answered me, And made me bold with strength in my soul.” He’s bold. He has strength in his soul. He’s courageous.

How did he do that? How do you become courageous like this psalmist? How do you press onward even when you’re scared? That’s courage. How do you remain strong in the face of pain and grief? That’s courage, too.

For the psalmist, his courage comes from remembering the glory of God and calling out to Him. Let your courage also come from calling out to the Lord and remembering His glory. That's a glorious courage.

Does that kind of courage depend on your own strength? If courage is being strong in the face of what frightens you, in the face of what causes you pain or grief, then whose strength is it that is giving you glorious courage?

The Apostle Paul sheds light on this in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10. “To keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

In the face of what caused Paul pain or grief, he was courageous. Whose strength animated his courage? The Lord said to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Whose power? The Lords!

Why does Paul say, “For when I am weak, then I am strong?” It's because he knows his own strength fails in the face of fear and pain and grief but God's doesn't. When we rely on God's promises, God's strength, God's mercy, then His grace is sufficient for us. Then our courage is based on His glory, not our own.

In the epistle lesson from Romans 11:33–36 Paul is overcome with the glory of God and how he has brought salvation to us sinners through Jesus Christ, making Jewish and Gentile believers one people, together heirs of eternal life, together children of Abraham by faith.

With his mind filled with God's glory, Paul interrupts his own writing with an explosion of praise. ³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ³⁴ *For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?* ³⁵ *Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?* ³⁶ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” When our minds are stayed on Christ, and not consumed with ourselves, we become filled with thanksgiving and praise and even a courage that's based on the glory of God.

In the Gospel lesson from Matthew chapter sixteen, Peter and the other apostles were given a task for which they would need courage. Jesus gave to the Church the power of the keys. That is, the power to say confidently to a sorry sinner that their sins are forgiven before God on account of Christ, and the power to say confidently to a not-sorry but secure sinner that their sins are not forgiven before God because they are rejecting Christ.

Not only does the Church have the power to say these words of absolution and admonition confidently, but we have confidence that according to Christ's promise that those sins actually are forgiven for the sorry sinner so that the broken-hearted may truly be comforted. And likewise

the sins of the unrepentant are actually bound upon them as they are admonished so that hard-hearted may become convicted to the point of repentance by the work of the Holy Spirit.

This teaching is from Christ's words to Peter in Matthew 16:19, "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Later in John chapter twenty Jesus gave this task of locking and unlocking consciences to all the apostles because this is the regular work of the whole Christian Church. The work of forgiving sins on the one hand and rebuking the obstinate on the other, is really God's work. Who can forgive sins but God alone!?

So how could the apostles and the whole Church after them possibly have the courage to speak on God's behalf? That's really what I'm doing after we confess our sins together in the worship service. I am speaking on God's behalf to announce the forgiveness of your sins, YOUR sins, on account of Jesus Christ dying for them in your place.

That word of absolution isn't one that I take lightly. It's a fearful and awesome thing to speak on God's behalf. And yet I can say it confidently with all boldness. How could the apostles and now the whole Church after them possibly have the courage to speak on God's behalf like that? Simply because we're not taking that responsibility upon ourselves—it's a God-ordained and God-given thing.

It's not our strength or glory that gives any weight to the words of admonition or the words of forgiveness—it's God's glory and His living and active Word which has promised to make forgiveness happen as the words proceed from our mouths, so it happens. The power and glory is in the Word and promise of God. Our courage in this matter is based on God's glory and confidence in His promise that the forgiveness of your sins which was won at the cross is distributed to you through the Word of the cross.

That is to say, your sins were forgiven 2,000 years ago at the cross, and the application of that forgiveness is poured out on you daily and abundantly as you walk in repentance and faith, remembering your baptism, receiving the Lord's supper, and believing the words of absolution as if they were spoken by God Himself.

You don't just get forgiven when you become a Christian. You were forgiven at the cross, and that forgiveness is daily and abundantly poured out upon you and the whole Christian Church through God's means of grace. Don't reject it. Receive with open hands of faith this forgiveness that you need daily and that God daily gives through the Word of the cross.

In Christ, you are forgiven, dear saints. He has unlocked the shackles of sin and brought you into His believing Church. An amazingly, He uses us in His Church as His mouthpieces of forgiveness and warning. The courage to be His mouthpiece comes from remembering who the glorious One is, who the strong One is, who the One is that is building the Church in the first place.

It's Jesus who builds the Church, and it's Jesus who gave the Church the power of the keys. He said in Matthew 16:18-19, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not

prevail against it. ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” He’s the one building and He’s the one giving the keys to bind and to loose.

So friends, when a troubled brother or sister in Christ confides in you their weakness and sin and desires to flee from it and find assurance of their salvation, declare to them with all boldness, confidence, and courage, that their sins are indeed forgiven in the sight of God because of Jesus.

Don’t make excuses for them or try to make them feel less bad by comparing them to others who are worse. Just forgive them. Courageously be God’s mouthpiece of comfort to the brokenhearted. Then help that forgiven sinner, bear one another’s burdens, point them to God’s love for them in Jesus, and how He loves us too much to leave us trapped in sin and brokenness.

The writer of Psalm 138 received help from the Lord in His weak and broken state. He says in verse three, “In the day when I cried out, You answered me, *And* made me bold *with* strength in my soul.”

Today, you have cried out and the Lord answered you. Do you feel bold and strengthened in your soul? Are you thinking, Pastor Amiot, what are you talking about? Why are you saying that I cried out today and that God answered me today?

Unless you skipped parts of the service recording and jumped straight to the sermon, you prayed the confession of sin right along with the whole congregation. That’s a cry out to the Lord. And unless you skipped over the absolution that followed it, the Lord answered your cry through the declaration of His grace. Don’t skip those parts. It’s by humbling yourself in that way that the Lord raises you up and by the promise of forgiveness in Christ He really does make you bold with strength in your soul, like the psalmist says.

The psalmist is full of praise to the Lord for His goodness. “I will praise You with my whole heart,” he says in Psalm 138:1. In verses five and six he says, “For great *is* the glory of the Lord. ⁶ Though the Lord *is* on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar.”

Live humbly before the Lord. Continually acknowledge your need and live in repentance and faith. The Lord is not near to the proud, but He regards you lowly ones. In your humbled state before the Lord He comforts you, He strengthens you, and He gives you a courage that comes from remembering the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ. It’s a glorious courage because it’s based on God’s glory and strength, not our own.

This is why the psalmist can say in Psalm 138:7, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, And Your right hand will save me.”

It’s like in Psalm 23 when we say along with King David, “Ye, though I walk in the valley of death, I shall fear no evil; for thou art with me.” How can the psalmist say in Psalm 138:7 so confidently, “though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me?” It’s because he has a courage that is animated by God’s promise, by God’s power and strength, by God’s glory, not his own.

How can we walk in the midst of trouble and yet do so with God-given courage and gratitude which explodes forth in us from His promises? We can walk in the valley of the shadow of death, fearing no evil, because there was one who walked so deeply into the midst of trouble and was Himself revived for our salvation.

When we read the psalms, we should look for how they were prophesying about Jesus. When Psalm 138:7 says, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me,” we should certainly take this as a promise for ourselves, that the Lord will restore and sustain us in our trouble, but that personal application is actually probably not the first or even the second application to be taken from the text.

First, we should consider that the psalmist himself was taking comfort from the Lord, so it applied to his own situation.

Second, and most importantly, it points us to Christ who walked in the midst of trouble as He was betrayed, falsely accused, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and was crucified and buried. All of Scripture points us to Christ, so we have every right to take this as a prophecy of Jesus, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me, [you will restore life to me].”

Because Jesus walked in the midst of trouble, even to the point of death on the cross, and was Himself revived on the third day, you who believe in Him and walk in the midst of trouble yourself will likewise be delivered by God.

First, see the psalm in its original historic application for the writer, then see it in light of Jesus, which is the most important angle in which to view it. Then with Christ in view and with the original writer’s suffering and faith in mind, take glorious courage yourself in the face of trouble. Jesus who walked in the midst of trouble for your sake was also revived for your sake, so that you who walk in the midst of trouble need not be afraid, for God is with you. Be of good courage; His grace is sufficient for you.

So may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.