

Ben Libby

Sermon

May 16th, Sixth Sunday after Easter, Ascension Sunday

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev 1:5-6 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is the 43rd Psalm:

Judge me justly, O God, and plead my case against an ungodly nation. Rescue me from the deceitful, wicked man. ² I know you are God, my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go around mourning because of oppression by the enemy? ³ Send out your light and your truth. Let them guide me. Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to your dwelling. ⁴ Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and gladness. Then I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God. ⁵ Why are you so depressed, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I will again praise him for my salvation from the face of my God.

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

As I was preparing for this sermon, I came across a riddle. I would like to pose it to you. The riddle goes like this: *"I am weak, but I am strong. I have no powers, but I am powerful. What am I?"*

What's the answer? Feelings! Feelings can be weak or strong. Feelings have no power in and of themselves. They are not tangible objects or facts. Yet they can make us react in dramatic ways. For both good and bad, feelings are powerful things.

What does it feel like to be strong? Well, it gives the impression of being able to do anything, that's there's nothing we can't do. If you feel strong, you will attempt to do things that normally you would not. On the other hand, feeling weak can make even the most ordinary tasks seem impossible.

The truth of the matter usually lies somewhere in the middle. You may feel strong, but that doesn't mean that you actually have the required strength. You may feel weak, but that doesn't mean that you can't do whatever it is you are supposed to do.

Peter felt strong setting out on the sea and walking to Jesus. But when the winds and the waves became boisterous, Peter sank. God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. But Moses thought he

was too weak for the task. Moses thought himself to be weak, but the LORD called him for a reason and delivered the people out of Egypt through him.

I think we all can feel both extremes at times in our life. There are times when it seems like we can do anything. There are times when it seems like we can't do anything. The key is understanding that we ourselves are not the determining factor. We need to understand who it is who is the true source of strength. **I can do all things THROUGH CHRIST who strengthens me. (Phi 4:13 NKJ)**

In our sermon text this morning, the author of this Psalm feels downright depressed. He feels weak, and there is an inner conflict. The author knows how he feels, but he also knows what has been promised by the LORD. Both things are very real, yet they don't agree with each other. It begs the question, "how should we deal with weakness here on earth?" We may feel rejected, yet God promises us that we are truly rescued. His Word is more powerful than any powerful feeling we might feel. Therefore, we will praise the LORD! We pray: LORD, SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH, AMEN!

"Weakness" is a very general. The three different types of weakness that come to me are these: structural weakness, physical weakness, and mental weakness. Structural weakness is a matter of integrity. We are about to replace one of our decks at the parsonage. Some of the boards are fine. But there are spots that you step on and you can feel the board about to buckle. The deck needs to be replaced because it is structurally weak.

What about physical weakness? Person A can lift 300 pounds. Person B can lift 200 pounds. Therefore, person B is weaker than person A. But physical strength is not the same as mental strength. Mental strength is the same thing as will power. It is the ability to not give in to something, whether it's as trivial as sticking to a diet or as serious as not giving into a sin. Being strong physically is not the same thing as being strong mentally or spiritually.

Here, in our text, the author is conflicted. He is being harassed by some unknown force. He feels the pressure and seeks rescue: **Judge me justly, O God, and plead my case against an ungodly nation. Rescue me from the deceitful, wicked man.**

We are not sure who the human author of these words is. It seems very connected to the previous Psalm, 42, which is attributed to the Sons of Korah. Whoever this was, they are certainly someone we can relate to.

Is it strange that the person is asking God to **"Judge me justly"**? Some translations render this as "Vindicate me", others go with "Judge me". I think our translation renders it well, because not only is the idea here to be judged, but to be judged rightly. It is like a legal appeal. God is seen here in view of the universal judge who has the power to vindicate or condemn anyone.

Whoever this **deceitful and wicked man** was, the author seems to be losing heart. Here we see this internal conflict: ² **I know you are God, my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go around mourning because of oppression by the enemy?**

It's like he's trying to square away the fact that God is his refuge while at the same time admitting that he feels like God has rejected him.

As a Christian, it is easy to feel like this. We know that God will give us good things, but it always seems like nice guys finish last. Like we are just the doormat of the world. How does the world react to injustice? If someone wrongs them, they feel entitled to do wrong in-kind. And us? We are instructed: **"But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. (Mat 5:39 NKJ)** Following Jesus' Words here is seen as weakness by the world. The world rejects us as weak, and because of that, it can also feel like God has rejected us also.

So, how do we explain tribulations? We tend to fall into faulty logic on the topic. "I am being attacked by someone, yet they remain unpunished, so therefore God must be angry with me." That was also how the author felt. He asks God, "Why have you rejected me?"

We need to be delivered. But, we are not the one who gets to determine when that happens. There are all kinds of parties that we feel like we need deliverance from in this world. But we need to start with the man in the mirror. **Rescue me from the deceitful, wicked man.** First and foremost, the deceitful and wicked man we need deliverance from is our own old Adam. He's ever present. He needs to be drowned with daily contrition and repentance. After that, don't worry about others. They are sinful and so are you. God will judge.

³ **Send out your light and your truth. Let them guide me. Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to your dwelling.**

We may feel rejected, despised, forsaken. But we never are. In fact, the truth is quite the opposite. We are delivered. We are saved. We have been rescued. That's what Jesus does.

Remember the words of another Psalm: **The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I**

fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid? (Psa 27:1 NKJ)

The key to not feeling weak spiritually is not determination. The key to not feeling weak spiritually is enlightenment through the Word of God. When you read about the promises God has made to you, how can you ever be seen as weak? Your God is the definition of strength. He created the universe by speaking it into existence. That very same Word tells you that you have been saved from sin and death forever. Nothing can happen to us that we cannot overcome through the All-powerful LORD!

Is this Psalmist then unbelieving? He feels like he is rejected by God, even though he knows that not to be the case. So, is this person's faith weak? Is ours?

NO! This is another key point. The key to not feeling weak spiritually is not to deny or ignore it. Denial of weakness is a weakness in and of itself. Don't deny feeling weak. The only way to fix weakness is to do the same thing this psalmist does here. To acknowledge it and go back to the Word.

Let's go back to those 3 kinds of weakness. If I was to walk out on my structurally weak deck, even though I can feel it buckle, I say, "This deck is solid", that's a denial which becomes my own foolishness. Or take someone who only can lift 200 pounds who decides he's not as weak as the person who can lift 300. So, he proves this by attempting to lift 300 pounds. When that bar comes crashing down on him, he would get seriously injured. He would be foolish to attempt that alone.

The same goes for will power. If you are on a diet, it's not a great idea to stroll through multiple pizza parlors. This seems like a no-brainer to us, and yet when it comes to sin, we like to think aren't weak. It's ok to watch that video even though we know it contains things that we should not subject ourselves to. It's ok to scroll through that gossipy Facebook post about our neighbor, we won't be influenced. It's all ok if we simply look but don't touch!

Of course not! It's trying. You're walking on weak ground. Once we recognize it, we need to go in the

opposite direction! It's important to identify our own weaknesses, to confess our weakness and sin, and go back to the Word. We have been rescued from all real weakness. Why then would we go back to places and things that try those weaknesses?

The answer to overcoming weakness is given here. **Send out your light and your truth. Let them guide me.** The light and truth of the Word guides us to life and salvation. It tells us that despite how weak we truly are, we have been forgiven. The Word points out our weakness, our sin. It doesn't deny or ignore them. Rather, it points out the Way to take care of them, to ride us of them completely, JESUS.

That is why it's never shameful to be seen as weak by the World. Look at Jesus! He was willing to be seen as weak for you! How trivial is our weakness in this world compared to Jesus' weakness on the cross? The Almighty Son of God, the Word incarnate Himself, was willing to be crucified and suffer hell on the cross so that your weakness would never condemn you again.

What did Paul say about being weak here in this world? **And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2Co 12:9-10 NKJ)**

All throughout this Psalm, there is this intense desire and longing to be with God. It's like the only cure to the depression and weakness the author feels are found in God's presence. **Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to your dwelling. 4 Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and gladness. Then I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God.**

The season of the Sundays after Easter often focus on the 40 days after Christ's resurrection. It

must have been great to interact and converse with the risen Savior. But, Jesus wasn't going to just hang around forever on earth. He had to Ascend, and the disciples had to disperse. They needed to see that the resurrection was real. But they also needed to move on. They had work to do.

How do we deal with weakness on this earth? Isn't that exactly what we are doing here today in church? Why do we get together at church? We do it for several reasons. #1 We do it to follow what God instructs us. It's the second commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy". Or another way to frame it is **25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:25 NKJ)**

#2 We also do it for each other. To encourage one another in the faith. The benefit is for all. We encourage our fellow believers here at church. But they also encourage us. #3 We gather to praise our God for what He has done for us. Here we read and study the Holy Word and see that He indeed is worthy to be praised. But church isn't something we do for God. It's something He does for you.

And that is reason #4. We gather to worship at church first and foremost to see what God does for us. Here we see that we are weak, that is, we are sinful. Here we also see that He is strong, that is, He is merciful, loving, steadfast, forgiving... This is something that we know by faith. And it is something that we daily need to be reminded of.

Verse 5 is a refrain that needs to be on a loop in our head constantly: **⁵ Why are you so depressed, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I will again praise him for my salvation from the face of my God.**

Throughout Psalm 42 and 43, this refrain is repeated 3 different times. Here, the inner conflict is solved! He realizes here that he feels depressed and disturbed, but he doesn't need to. Why? Because he knows that no matter what happens to him, he will

praise God again. Same for us! No matter what happens to us, even if we die on the trip home this morning, you will praise God again. You will praise Him in your heavenly home which He has provided for you.

Jesus is there right now, preparing a place for you. Will we experience pain and grief from here to there? Will our weaknesses show themselves time and time again? No doubt. But the concrete truth of justification stands forever. We can feel strong at times. Other times we may feel weak. But no matter how we feel, we are saved by Jesus and that fact remains true no matter what!

Let's ask the riddle one more time: *"I am weak, but I am strong. I have no powers, but I am powerful. What am I?"* The best answer to that riddle is not "feelings", rather the best answer is "A CHRISTIAN!!!" Doesn't that riddle describe us? We are weak. Those weaknesses show themselves constantly. But we have been made strong through our Strong Savior. We have no powers. We were dead in our sins. And yet, we have been made to be powerful through the powerful Word. It tells us that we stand forgiven. It tells us to preach that same Word boldly, in and out of season. And it tells us to worship the Lord!

So, that is what we will do. He has saved us. He has turned our weaknesses into strengths. No longer are we weak sinners doomed to die. Now we are saved saints, destined to inherit heaven. Where He is, there we shall be also. We don't need to feel depressed or disturbed. Let us praise the LORD, for we know whatever happens, we will praise Him again! AMEN!!!