

BROOMFIELD

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God: The Believer's Stronghold

Masada

In the summer of 66 A.D. a group of Jewish Zealots in Jerusalem rebelled against Rome. This eventually resulted in Rome conquering Jerusalem and the burning of the temple in 70 A.D. And yet before Jerusalem was conquered, a group of Jewish Zealots took control of a fortified palace west of the Dead Sea known as Masada.

Now Masada was a large rock in the shape of a table 193 feet above sea level on which Herod built quite an elaborate palace. Because it had a large cistern, Herod was able to live quite comfortably even though Masada was located in a desert. In that day and time, it was an incredible STRONGHOLD if protected well. One couldn't attack it without first scaling the almost vertical walls. And during one's scaling attempt, you would be easy prey to rocks and debris.

And that is why when after Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D., Rome set its sights against Masada. It would take them another three long years to build a ramp to the top of the mountain in order to break through the walls of Masada and conquer its Jewish inhabitants. Truly, the Jews could not have chosen a better stronghold in all of Rome than Masada.

Family of God, did you know that God is a stronghold for His children?

Nahum 1:7, "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."¹

The difference is that whereas Masada eventually failed its Israelite refugees, God will never fail His children! And that is the theme of the Psalm at which we are looking.

While the Psalmist here is appealing to God to take vengeance on the wicked the basis for this appeal is found in verse 22.

Psalm 94:22, "But the LORD is my defence [stronghold]; and my God is the rock of my refuge."

Truly, God is our rock — our stronghold! And what difference should this make in our lives?

¹ Compare also 2 Samuel 22:3, and Psalm 62:2

A Strong Conviction

Recognizing God as our stronghold leads first to a strong conviction.

Psalm 94:17, “Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.”

This really is an incredible statement. For the context speaks of remarkable suffering. Verses 1 – 7 speaks of the wicked’s treatment of the godly. Now we know that God’s word says this:

2 Timothy 3:12, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

And that is the case in our passage.

Psalm 94:5-7, “They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.”

Psalm 94:21, “They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood.”

This is a traumatic description of the severity of persecution which God’s people were undergoing. If you did a word study from the Bible on “widow,” “stranger,” and “orphan” you would discover that all three of these classes of people hold a special place in the heart of the Lord. Truly, these should be the LAST people neglected or mistreated both to the people of God, and God Himself.

And yet here we read of their destruction!

From this we conclude that if these be the object of persecution and destruction, then the war is far advanced. The “atrocious” has become the norm.

Imagine reading of a war in which the wounded and helpless had become the special object of attack. We would be outraged! And yet, that is the situation surrounding the Psalmist here. Amazingly though, the picture gets even more grim.

Though verses 8-11 contain a rebuke and warning to these persecutors, nevertheless they also imply that God’s dealing with these enemies is yet future.

Psalm 94:10, “He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? he that teacheth” man knowledge, shall not he know?

In other words, deliverance and vindication had yet to occur for the Psalmist.² Currently, he was sore oppressed. And yet, if things weren’t bad enough in the midst of this horrible situation, verses 12-16 speak of God’s people receiving discipline from the Lord.

Psalm 94:12, “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law;”

² Compare also verse 7

Granted, the promise of discipline here is given to comfort and assure God's people of God's ultimate victory and love for them, nevertheless we all agree that “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful” (Hebrews 12:11).

Now in the midst of all of this, the Psalmist expresses in our passage a profound confidence in God's help.

Psalm 94:17, “Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.”

In other words, if God wasn't my Rock, I would have died a long time ago. If God wasn't my Stronghold, I couldn't stand.

Isn't this a glorious truth?

In fact, I doubt that there are few who couldn't nor wouldn't confess the same this day. In the midst of hardship and difficulty, God is the one who helps us and enables us to stand. And yet, let's be honest, that God is our Stronghold certainly leads to the confession of this passage — but not much more.

When it comes down to it, when the difficulty comes, the heat is on, and the future is unsure, God as my stronghold can seem like mere words.

Yet family of God, this conviction is far more than just words. It is a genuine recognition that God is our stronghold results in an incredible course of living.

Hanging on Love

Psalm 22:18³, “When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O LORD, held me up.”

Now let's talk about this verse. “When I said, my foot slipped” has as its reference any kind of physical or external struggle. As we have seen, in this context it can mean persecution, difficulty, harassment, and loss of life. Truly, the Psalmist here is faced with physical circumstances some of which we are familiar.

While we may not be physically persecuted today, we are no strangers to difficulty. Today I know I speak to people who are struggling with their marriages, in their walks, with holiness, and with their health.

And when we find ourselves so struggling, what is our hope and strength?

So often it is “the counselor,” or the good friend, or the bottle, or the television. Yet God is our stronghold; it is to Him that we must flee. Solomon said, “The name [character] of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe” (Proverbs 18:10).

After living life and having at his disposal any and all forms of protection — whether that is palaces, armies, or weaponry — Solomon concluded that God was the only strong tower of safety. Accordingly, Korah wrote these words:

Psalm 46:1-3, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the

³ NASB renders it thus: “If I should say, 'My foot has slipped,' Thy lovingkindness, O Lord, will hold me up.”

sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

In other words, though the world fall all around us, we are safe in God! David wrote this:

Psalm 20:7, “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.”

David was well-acquainted with war. And yet of all things that He relied upon in battle, it was the character of God! Likewise, Habakkuk wrote this:

Habakkuk, 3:17-29, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.”

God as the believer's stronghold isn't mere words. It radically transforms the way we view life — it effects the way we live. In fact, it does this in our text.

Psalm 94:18, “When I said, My foot slippeth; **thy mercy, O LORD, held me up.**”

This is a phenomenal statement and such an important truth. When life is hard, you can't find the strength to carry on and your soul is oppressed that which only can and will lift you up is the mercy of God!

What is the lovingkindness or mercy of the Lord?

We could begin by making a list of the incredible acts of love that God daily gives us.

- He bears patiently with us.
- He upholds us.
- He hears our prayer.
- He guides us.
- He delivers us.
- He accepts us!
- In the words of Spurgeon: “Ah! Beloved, Christ will take anything that comes from your heart, whatever the gift may be. However feeble, and weak, and insignificant it may seem to others, it shall be rich and lovely to him, if it comes from your heart.”

Yet, the ultimate expression of His love is found in Christ Himself.

1 John 3:16, “**Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us:** and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

If one asks the suffering saint whose testimony is one of growth and not decline, softening and not hardening for the explanation of their good cheer, confidence, and joy in the midst of difficulty and their answer will be this: “I have come to Him who has made my yoke easy and my load light.” “I have been redeemed by unalterable love!”

This is what Paul meant when he said, “For the love of Christ controls us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). And brothers and sisters, when we consider what our sin deserves and what we have received from God instead truly we can testify to the lovingkindness of the Lord holding us up!

Living in Hope

And yet it doesn't stop here. When God is our stronghold, notice another result will be living in hope.

Psalm 94:19, “In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.”

Once again let's look at this verse in sections. First, let us examine the phrase “in the multitude of my thoughts within me.” This verse is in contrast to verse 18 where the focus is on the external or physical difficulty. Here the focus is upon the internal difficulty — anxious thoughts that molest and shake us.

And what are the anxious thoughts that consumed the Psalmist?

We could put them in the form of questions. Has God forgotten me?

Psalm 94:3, “LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?”

Psalm 94:4, “How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves?”

Has God forsaken me?

Psalm 94:5, “They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage.”

Has God abandoned me?

Psalm 94:14, “For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.”

To affirm this, truth implies that you had to have thought the opposite at one time or another. Truly, the Psalmist had many anxious thoughts. And so do we.

- Where is God when it hurts?
- Has He forgotten me?
- I want to know why the suffering?
- Why the difficulty?
- Why the failure?

Our anxious thoughts are legion today, aren't they? And yet, notice that which satisfied the Psalmist's heart was “thy comforts delight my soul” (Psalm 94:19b).

What are the consolations of the Lord?

The primary idea behind “consolation” is the word comfort. For example, this word is used these places in Scripture.

Psalm 23:4, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

Isaiah 40:1, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.”

Thus, the consolations of the Lord are the expressions of comfort which He gives to His children on a daily basis.

Now what are these expressions of comfort?

In a word, they are the promises of the Lord which arise from a saving relationship with Him.

Isaiah 49:13-15, “Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.”

Isaiah 52:8-9, “Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the LORD hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem.”

How has God comforted His people? It is through the promise in verse 8. “They shout joyfully together; for they will see with their own eyes when the Lord restores Zion” (Isaiah 52:8 NASB).

Now whether these promises are in the form of a promised protection, or a promised glorious hereafter nevertheless they ALL arise from the promises of our unchanging Lord! This is why Paul said, “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

Truly, if we are going to know the promises of the Lord, we must be in the word of the Lord! And so, what are the “consolations of the Lord?” They are the comforts He gives in His word in the form of promises.

Our Expectations

Now based on this I want to remind you of a life-changing truth. In the church today, it is common to find Christians deriving their expectations for living from the commands of the Lord. For example many follow these commands “husbands, love your wives⁴,” “do not lie to one another⁵,” and “do your work heartily for the Lord.⁶” Now based on these commands, it is not hard to find Christians upset and angry when others do not hold to these commands.

And yet, don't miss it! The commands of the Lord should form the basis NOT of our expectations BUT of our prayer life.

⁴ Compare Ephesians 5:25

⁵ Compare Colossians 3:9

⁶ Compare Colossians 3:25

As the Bible says, “Husbands, love your wives” this should serve as the basis for every wife to begin praying for their husbands to fulfill God’s command. Now in contrast, it is the promises of the Lord that should form our expectations for living!

The Consolations of the Lord

In other words, if God has promised to love you, then one can expect God to fulfill this promise.

So what has God promised you child of God?

You who are struggling under a mountain of worry and concern? You who are close to fainting under the pressure of it all? What are the consolations of the Lord?

Let me give you just a few. And as I give them to you, think of the burden pressing heavily upon you today.

Exodus 14:14, “The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.”

Psalms 34:19, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.”

Psalms 149:4, “For the LORD taketh pleasure in his people: he will beautify the meek with salvation.”

Matthew 28:20, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, **lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.** Amen.”

Romans 8:29, “Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, [nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

2 Thessalonians 3:3, “But the Lord is faithful, **who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.**”

1 John 3:2, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, **when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.**”

Oh family of God, these are but few of the consolations of the Lord. These are the words upon which you can stake your life!

And thus when the pressures of life weigh heavy upon you allow the consolations of the Lord to comfort your soul.

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About the Preacher

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