

The Lord our strength

Part 1

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[00:00:01] I'm sure you will agree with me, beloved brethren, that when we think of our subject, strength, the strength of God, although as our brother pointed out, I don't think that expression is in scripture, but it's implied, and the way that that strength comes into our lives in such a wonderful way. But when we think about strength, I'm sure that you think of many other similar attributes. We've read of them. Power, might, greatness, ability, dominion. They're all very similar words, aren't they? Inasmuch as they put together, [00:01:01] I believe in the power of the Spirit would give us a sense of the greatness of God, the One who has become our Saviour. I want tonight to think of that little expression that we read of in Ephesians. The power that raised Christ from the dead, that power which is now towards us. I believe the greatest demonstration of the power of God was seen when the Lord Jesus was brought, was raised from the dead, carried up into glory, and set down, the right hand of the Majesty on high. Aren't you thrilled when you read those [00:02:04] words? Far above all principality and power and might and dominion in this world and in that which is to come, the power of God that raised the Lord Jesus out from the dead, took him, as it were, from the very bottom. Words of Jonah. I went down to the bottom, he didn't. There was one who went lower than that, and that was our Saviour, the man of Calvary. But in that test to which he went, the power of God took him and placed him far above all power and might. I mean, that power is the power that is towards us now, who believe. [00:03:04] Think of it, beloved brethren, we thought of it much these last two days. The strength, the power of God that led men of old to do great exploits. I say again, the greatest demonstration of that power was seen in all its greatness when the Lord Jesus was taken out of the dead and carried up to glory, into heaven. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus to the Sadducees? You know not the Scriptures, nor the power of God. Why? They didn't believe in the resurrection. There the Lord Jesus himself makes it perfectly clear that the power of God is seen in the power of resurrection. Firstly in regard to the Lord Jesus. Soon in regard to all those that are his and his coming, when that mighty power will empty [00:04:03] all the cemeteries, and every saint of God, right back to Amos, will be caught up to be forever with the Lord, the mighty power of God. I love reading that little account in Daniel, you know. Nebuchadnezzar was a very foolish man, because he challenged God. He was the most powerful man in the world at that time. He had a kingdom that was beyond any other. Whom he would, he kept alive, and whom he would, he put to death. Nobody queried what he did, until that day when he challenged God. You remember he asked that [00:05:03] question. Who is that God that can deliver you out of my hand? Very dangerous thing to say. I think Saul of Tarsus learned that later in his life. You remember what he said when he repeated his conversion to the king. He said, I thought to do many things against the name of Jesus Christ, which things I also did. The awful power of Satan had so recently taken hold of Stephen, and he was put to death. Just at that very moment, the Spirit of God so to speak said, you've taken Stephen, we might say an outstanding Christian. And the [00:06:13] Lord said to Satan, I have your chief. And he took

ahold of Saul of Tarsus. That very one who said, in all the madness and folly of his thinking, I'll stamp out the name of Jesus of Nazareth, became his greatest folly. Think about later on he speaks of the grace of Christ that superabounded toward him in faith and in love. How he knew the meanings of those words. Superabounded towards him. Something that was beyond any other thing [00:07:05] that he knew in his life. The grace of Christ that came down and met him in his madness on that road to Damascus. That man who was the leader in evil, you notice the first thing that is said of him after he gets converted? He rose up from the earth and he was led by the hand. Someone else had taken control of Saul and Tarsus. What a miracle. What power.

What love. What grace. And in our measure, we've all tasted it.

Let us read again those words of those faithful men.

[00:08:06] We are not careful to answer thee, O nebuchadnezzar, in this matter. If our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king, and be it known unto thee, if not, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image. Do you remember the words of Gabriel to Mary?

She asked the question, after having been given a most wonderful message. She said, How can this be? And you can picture, you know, Gabriel in all the majesty and power [00:09:08] of his person saying, With God, all things are possible. And we've thought about that, haven't we? Do we honestly believe it, beloved brethren? Is our faith of sufficient character to reach out to a God with whom nothing is impossible? I believe these men knew something about that. Our God, the God they knew, is able to deliver us. But you know, there are two things that come out here. There is the faith that will rely upon God to deliver.

[00:10:03] But there is the subjection that, if necessary, will bow to the wisdom that says no. That's a different thing.

You've heard the story of the two little girls who were talking about prayer. One was complaining to the other and she said, God never answers my prayers. The other little girl said, Oh, God always answers my prayers. But sometimes he says no. And it's then, beloved brethren, that we all need grace. Faith that reaches out to one who is all powerful, supreme in power, but likewise supreme in wisdom. And sometimes he says no. And then we have [00:11:07] to learn the lesson of being subject to him. Think of Gethsemane. Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from me. Nonetheless, not my will. It's time to be done.

A man once asked Hudson Taylor what was his greatest mission in life. He answered it with one word. Submission. Beloved brethren, that are the two sides of the power of God. We know it. We acknowledge its omnipotence. But at the same time we have to acknowledge the power of wisdom. They say no. There have been men of God throughout the ages of history [00:12:10] since the day of Pentecost, starting with James and Stephen, right up to the present day. Men who have submitted themselves to the will of God when God has said no. God has been glorified. We touched a bit this afternoon the words of the Lord to Peter. That when thou art old another shall take thee and lead thou where thou wouldest not. Did you notice what the Lord Jesus said further on? Or the Spirit of God says in interpreting the Lord's words, this he said signifying by what death he should glorify God. God is glorified even when he says no. And the servant submits to the will of God. I say again, beloved brethren, [00:13:09] that's a hard lesson to learn. It might be a greater lesson than the

deliverance that God can effect as he did here. Do you know, I can well understand that Nebuchadnezzar changed the names of these three men. I'm quite certain he would not allow in his kingdom three prominent men with names like they had, that were given them as the children of Israel. Good question for the young people in the Sunday school. What were the names of these three men? Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego. Well, they were Hananiah, Azariah and Meshach. Now I'm sure most of you know that all those names contain the name of God [00:14:09] in it. I can understand Nebuchadnezzar not wanting in his kingdom three men whose names mean this, the favour of God, help of God. What about Meshach? Who is like our God? You think of a man walking through the kingdom of Babylon with this plastered across his Who is like our God? I can understand Nebuchadnezzar didn't allow it so he gave them a different name. But did you know this or when you've got a moment, read the previous chapter. When [00:15:01] Nebuchadnezzar had a problem, a dream that he couldn't even remember but expected somebody to interpret, impossible, said his magicians and sorcerers. Daniel heard about it. He sought time. He gathered together his three companions and made a prayer meeting. It's a good thing when in our prayer meeting we've got the spirit of these men, the grace of God, the help of God. Who is there like our God? Marvellous companions of prayer and Daniel that night is given the dream and its interpretation. Brethren I think this is a challenge to our hearts tonight as to how much we can speak and testify and experience in our life of [00:16:04] the grace of God that came down, that met us in all our need at Calvary and has been with us and helped us every moment of our lives since that moment. The help that God has given us in all the circumstances of life, individual, family, meetings, the help we do need is available in the Lord Jesus Christ. But oh beloved brethren, let us get a hold of this spirit of this man, Michel. Let some of the enthusiasm of Christianity fill our hearts and our lives so that there might be a testimony rendered out from us. Who is like our God? There isn't anybody like him. And at the end of this chapter Nebuchadnezzar [00:17:06] has to acknowledge that there is no God like the God of these three men. I've referred to you, I must rush on, I've only got another 25 minutes. I read to you those verses in the first chapter of Ephesians. I only want to speak about verse 19 because I do not know of another verse in the scriptures that is so replete of the power of God. Let me just read again that verse 19. What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us all who believe according to the working of his mighty power? Now just think of it. Exceeding greatness, [00:18:10] power, working, mighty power. All in one verse. I don't know of another verse in scripture like it. And you know sometimes, as we've already been told to do at this conference, it's a good idea to get out of concordance and look some of these words up. You'll be amazed watching this verse. I'm not going into the Greek. But the word exceeding means to throw beyond, from which we get our word hyper. Hyper. Something that is beyond anything else. The word greatness here is the word mega. Young people use that word today, don't [00:19:03] they? They say it's mega. I wonder if they realise it's in the Bible. It's the word here for greatness, power. This is the word that in our English we get the word dynamo from, or dynamite. You see the way the spirit of God is building up a picture. Greatness, exceeding power, working. That's where we get our word energy from. Something that is beyond anything else. Something that is greater than anything else. Something that is more powerful than anything else. Something that has more energy than anything else. And then we've got the [00:20:07] word mighty. Well that refers to the power that is inherent in God himself. God doesn't have to go to anybody for help. It's all there in himself. Think of the one who spoke and creation came into being. Think again of the one who raised Jesus from the dead and placed him at the top. And the last word, power, is not the same as the original one. It's a word which means bigger. Well you search these things out for yourself and you tell me if you can find a verse that more demonstrates and is full of the power of God. But notice what it says. It's to us Lord. All that energy, all that vitality, all that power, greater [00:21:08] than anything else. The spirit of God says it's to us Lord. Perhaps it was what the writer of our hymn had in his mind when he penned those words that we sung. All fullness resides in

Christ Jesus our head. Because that's where all this power is resident at this moment. But remember this power that is in his hands. The same hands that were laid on the cross.

The hands at this moment that are great in power and administration, able to pour blessing and help into the hearts and lives of his saints, are those same blessed hands by the [00:22:06] which he was nailed to the cross. Here in the Lord Jesus we have not only power, we have love. It's a different matter altogether. And so I read to you three things out of Hebrews. I'm sure you've noticed this. Able to succour. Able to sympathise. You say that's not in the verses. You read Mr. Darby's translation. Cannot be touched is sympathised. And thirdly able to save. I just refer to those verses again, lest I misquote them. For as much as [00:23:04] the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he himself likewise took part of the same and came down into that condition which was common to you and I, but into which he voluntarily stooped, a divine person. He passed by angels because it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren. He came down to where we were. And in this epistle it's to this end that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour. Now what does this word mean? Able to succour. Well elsewhere it's translated [00:24:05] very simply help. Able to help them that are being tempted. What an encouragement that is, my friend. To realise that the Lord Jesus, when he walked through this world, he suffered being tempted yet without sin. I believe the Lord Jesus passed through every experience in his life that it is possible for a saint of God to pass through in their lives. You need to think about that. I'm convinced in my own mind. He passed through everything that you and I can possibly pass through. This word help is perhaps best understood [00:25:04] if you turn to Mark chapter 9 where there was that man with that faithful condition, with that son, possessed of a demon, who was seeking to destroy him and that dear man brought him to his disciples and they couldn't do anything. He turns to the Lord Jesus. He says help, Lord. The Lord Jesus said to him, if thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. What did he say? Lord, help my unbelief. And that's this word. There was a circumstance there when that dear man realised that he had not got a faith that was great enough to deal with the circumstance. I think we all have been in those circumstances [00:26:02] where we have to acknowledge that our faith is not great enough to deal with the problem and the temptation and the difficulty. The Lord Jesus, the one who has passed into the heavens, into the presence of God, he understands, he knows. And at that moment when faith might be weak, he knows what it is to pour help into our heart. He is able to succour us.

Not only so. Chapter 4, seeing then that we have a great high priest that has passed into the heavens, do you notice that? How the Spirit of God delights to speak of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. Here is just a passing reference to that mighty power that took him and he passed through the heavens into the very presence of God as a man. But what sort [00:27:06] of a man? A man who has walked through this world. He knows what sorrow and temptation mean for he has felt the pain. I say again, there is not a sorrow, there is not a feeling, there is not an emotion that you and I can experience in our life. But what he did not feel, the man in this world, carried our sorrows, bore our infirmities. Remember what the disciples said to the Lord about that man, why could not we cast out the demons? [00:28:03] Remember what the Lord Jesus said, this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting. What does that tell me? The Lord Jesus before he healed that dear child, he passed through in his spirit all that was going on in the life of that poor child and that husband. He felt the sorrow of the father. You remember what he said, how long has he been like this? It was the words of a doctor, isn't it? How long has he been like this? Did he not know? Of course he knew. And there was run from that dear man's heart, those words of a child.

He was touched, he was moved. There had been a night of prayer and a night of fasting that [00:29:14] nobody knew about on behalf of that incident. The Lord Jesus felt in his spirit what he healed by his power and that is the man who is our great priest in the presence of God. And this verse here tells us, uses a double negative which adds emphasis to what is being said. A double negative is an affirmative. He says we have not a high priest who cannot sympathise with the feelings of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted, there it is, all points tempted, like as we are yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne [00:30:03] of grace. Jesus understands. Jesus knows. He feels. Remember what he said to Saul of Tarsus? Why did he persecute us without me? The head was feeling what the members of the body were suffering. A beautiful man, born and wept compassion, the sorrow. He is just the same. Just the same person. Now at the right hand of God and he is able to supply everything that we need. Let us therefore come boldly under the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, find grace to help. That is not all. He not only can help, succour, [00:31:02] he not only can sympathise, can feel what we are going through, but our last one in Hebrew says he can save. To the other mode. I don't think this is the salvation of the soul. He certainly can do that. I believe these verses envisage the sign of God moving through this world, encompassed with infirmity and difficulty, opposition. This glorious man, because he liveth ever, Jesus will never die again. He lives in the power of an endless life. And because he is there, he is able to save right through to the other mode. Those that come unto God. I don't think it is referring to what we did when we trusted the Lord Jesus [00:32:06] and our Saviour. I think this is a continuum coming unto God by him. Such one, this glorious person, he is able to save to the other mode. Those that come unto God by him. For a little bit longer. I took you back to the epistle to the Ephesians, to the second prayer. A remarkable epistle. I think it is the only epistle that has two prayers in it. The other thing I want you to notice, beloved brothers, is the way that this, in this one, and in the last scripture that we read, the verses end with a doxology. A benediction is the blessing of God coming down. A doxology is the response of hearts that go up to the sword.

[00:33:11] So the apostle says, now unto him that is able to do, exceeding abundantly. You see once again the Spirit of God seems to be bringing together superlative words in order that the power of them might register in our heart. Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. What an encouragement for a prayer making that is, beloved brothers. How often we have to confess that we don't know how to prioritise.

[00:34:08] Thank God that the Spirit of God can take those groanings and present them in a way that we cannot. Because he knows the mind of God and sometimes we don't. But what an assurance these verses are. We have a door of access into a person who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. According to the power that worker in us. You see again the connection with the first prayer? The mighty power of God that was towards us. It's available. And here again that power working in us would cause [00:35:03] us to reach out to the one who is far greater than our need. Who has a perfect knowledge of the beginning right through to the end. Who always knows best. And can do far more than what we ask for or what we think. You know when Paul thinks about this. And this is a good way to end a prayer meeting. Unto him be glory in the church. By Christ Jesus throughout all ages. World without end. There's the supreme end of the power of God. When glory will be ascribed to him eternally and it will never end. Why? Because the man of Calvary is in the glory. But I read to you the apostle Paul's words to Timothy in the [00:36:04] second letter. The last letter we believe that he wrote. In the week he acknowledges in verse 15 of chapter 1. This thou knowest that all they which are in Asia have turned away from me. I think you know and I have to confess this that if I ever got to a state of having to confess this I would be of all men most miserable. To say in effect that everything that I laboured for, everything that I tried to do has come to nothing.

Beloved brethren I think there are a good many of us that feel like this in this country. [00:37:04] I'm sure our beloved brother Peter is not true of him. But there is with us I believe honestly before God a hang of the head in recognition of the fact that we have failed. Many have turned aside. But what does the apostle say? In view of that dreadful aid to his labours in that country, in Asia. He says nevertheless I am not ashamed. For I know whom I have believed. He knew the person that his confidence and his trust within. And he says I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. I have no argument with any person who preaches the gospel from this [00:38:06] verse. But I believe brethren we need to look at it in the context and get the real meaning. I do not think the apostle Paul was referring to his precious soul committed into the hands of the Saviour. It had been through and he will keep it. But I don't think that what he was referring to. I think he was referring to his labour, his toil, his commission, his ministry. All that he had suffered for the name of Jesus Christ. Witnessing before kings and gentiles. Tirelessly. And here in this chapter it looks as though it is all for nothing. But he says I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that [00:39:06] which I have trusted, committed to him against that day. And that day of course is the day of the appearance. The day of Jesus Christ. There beloved brethren will be found the answer to the little that you and I have raised up in this world. It is not for nothing. It's not in vain beloved brethren. We have things that are worth holding on to. Let us not give them up. Let us be able to voice these words I know whom I have believed. Let us know what it is to commit our labours to him. We may not see much result. We may see the reverse. But that day will declare it. And the Lord Jesus will be glorified. And you and I will [00:40:06] be with him to share in his glory. And lastly I read that verse in the epistle of Jude. Which beloved brethren may I suggest to you is a very beautiful way to end this conference. I always have a problem finding Jude. There is this exhortation that again I'll read without comment. But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And then in verse 24. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling. [00:41:01] That word means to stumble. Unto him that is able to keep you from stumbling. What encouragement that is. We're connected with one who has the ability to keep us from stumbling. But he doesn't end there. And to present you for this. Before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. What a wonderful verse that is. That our God is not only able to keep us from stumbling in this world. Able to sympathize, succor and save. Able to do more than we can ask or think. Able to keep what we've committed to him. Able to keep [00:42:02] us from stumbling. Beloved brethren in a soon coming day he is able to present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. Whose joy? Our joy? Yes. Beloved brethren this is the joy of God. There is coming a moment when the Lord Jesus will catch up every believer. His body, his bride. He will not only present, God will not only present to him as the personal answer to his suffering unto death. We will be caught up and be presented faultless before the presence of his glory. What a hope we have for our brethren. Let us [00:43:09] take courage. Let us go on. Let us draw from the mighty resources that are available to us in the power of the Spirit. Let us encourage one another. Let us keep going on because before us very soon is this moment when we will be presented faultless before his glory with exceeding joy. Remember the expression at the end of Luke chapter 15 where the father says to the son who wouldn't go in concerning the return of his prodigal. He says it was meant that we should make merry and rejoice. Beloved brethren there is coming a moment [00:44:06] when God will look around and will see his beloved son and that vast company all like him. I believe in deepest reverence God will say it was meant that we should make merry and that will go on for eternity. May the Lord bless his work.