

## **MAKE ME STRONG IN MY SOUL**

Psalm 138: 1-8 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Most of us struggle to become strong in our souls and to remain strong in our souls. The reason is, we easily become fettered, bound with chains. These chains we most often forge ourselves, link by link, and thread by thread. It's these little links and threads that rob us of strength and boldness in our souls. These little links and threads can bind us all to the block of misery for life. We all face these little links and threads of discouragement, laziness, tardiness, bitterness, jealousy, selfishness, and thanklessness. In colonial times, Timothy Dexter said, "An ungrateful man is like a hog under a tree, eating acorns, never looking up to see where all the acorns come from." It doesn't take much to make us timid in our souls. I've personally found fear to be paralyzing to me until I cry out for help to Jesus. There's a reason God calls us all sheep. Sheep don't attack lions or bears or wolves. You'll never hear a sheep roar. Sheep are easy prey. A circus many years ago put a lion and a lamb in the same cage. Folk were always attracted to that cage. One man asked the attendant if the lion and the lamb got along well. The attendant replied, "Most of the time, yes, but now and then we have to put in a new lamb."

Most of us need tons of encouragement. We are as young as our hope and as old as our despair. If we measured on a Richter scale the average level of discouragement in our sanctuary this morning, or the average level of our fear, it might surprise us to find out how discouraged or fearful we all are. When we are discouraged, troubles are attracted to us like a magnet. Troubles defy the law of gravity. If we are fearful in our souls, troubles are easier to pick up than to drop. What did David want when he cried to God for strength in his soul? What was David after? In our world, some believe arrogance is strength, or rudeness, or crudeness, or rigidity, or brutality or a souped-up car or nice clothes, or vulgar language or lustfulness, or drunkenness or addiction. The list is long and none of these are soul strength.

I accept the heading of this psalm as it stands. David is the psalmist here. The occasion for the psalm relates to David's bold confession of confidence in God as he planned to build a temple for God whom he loved. The occasion appears in II Samuel 7: 2-3, as King David was saying to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." Initially, Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you." But later as we read in I Chronicles 17: 3-4, "But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, "Thus says the Lord: "It is not you who will build me a house to dwell in." When Solomon, David's son, built the temple and dedicated it, in I Kings 8:16-21, he prayed this prayer. "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who with His hand has fulfilled what He promised with His mouth to David my father, saying, 'I chose David to be over My people Israel.'

Now it was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD said to David my father, ‘Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless, you shall not build the house, but your son who shall be born to you shall build the house for My name.’ Now the LORD has fulfilled His promise that He made. For I have risen in the place of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and I have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. And there I have provided a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD that He made with our fathers, when He brought them out of the land of Egypt.” This is the background of this psalm.

II Samuel 7:1 tells us the occasion for David wanting to build the temple. In 1042 BC, it was written, “Now when the king lived in his house and the Lord had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, in effect, “God needs a house for Himself.” With this occasion in mind, with David’s enemies defeated, David begins giving thanks to the Lord and calls on God to increase the strength in his soul—v. 3. In verse 8, David with strength in his soul finishes his psalm with these words, “The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me.” I memorized it years ago as, “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.” All of us need more strength in our souls as David cried out for. What is missing in our souls, that should make us all cry out for strength in our souls too, as David cried out to God? In this psalm, I see four ingredients that are part and parcel of a divinely bestowed, bold, strong soul. What are they? Are they missing in your life?

**FOR A STRONG SOUL, WE MUST KNOW HOW TO THANK GOD WITH OUR WHOLE HEART AND SING OF HIS WAYS.** (I.) Notice Psalm 138: 1-2 and 4-5 “I give You thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods, I sing Your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to Your Name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for You have exalted above all things Your Name and Your Word... All the kings of the earth shall give You thanks, O Lord, for they have heard the words of Your mouth, and they shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord.” Psalm 137 was written in the remembrance of trouble, in a time the Jews in exile, refused to sing, but in Psalm 138, the song of David is full-throated and full-hearted. Trouble and tears is the story in Psalm 137 but Psalm 138 is about trouble and triumph. In Psalm 137, the foreigners were soon to be judged, but in Psalm 138, David prophesied that the foreign kings would sing of the ways of the Lord.

This is the king of Israel thanking the Lord, but in the spontaneity of this psalm, there is no formality. When we get too formal, we often lose spontaneity. Notice the use of the pronoun You and Your—referring to the Lord as David is thanking the Lord for victory over his foes—and praising Him. Nineteen times in these 8

verses, David speaks personally with You or Your to God. Notice here in Verse 1, “I give You thanks,” “I sing Your praise.” Verse 2, “I bow down toward Your holy temple,” “I give thanks to Your name,” “for Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness,” “You have exalted Your name and Your Word.” Verse 4, “kings shall give You thanks, for they have heard the words of Your mouth.”

Some things to note in David’s thanksgiving and singing is that it is in the presence of the nations all around him with their gods, their idols. We dare not believe such gods are real, and yet, we cannot deny their existence in David’s day and in our own day. Idolatry has always been rampant. People have forever been trying to fill the empty vacuum in their hearts with gods of their own making. This verse—“Before the gods, I sing Your praise doesn’t mean there are many gods to praise and David’s God is # 1. Never! Never! Never! In the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20: 3, God said, “You shall have no other gods before me.” In Isaiah 44: 6, we read, “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and His Redeemer, the Lord of hosts. ‘I am the first and I am the last; besides Me, there is no god.’”

I call us to thank the God of gods, the Lord of lords, and the King of kings—in the presence of the false gods around us. In the midst of gods and goddesses around us in America, the gods of money, evolution, false religion, sports, sex, materialism, lust, anger, political correctness, greed, gossip, lies, bitterness, hate, terrorism, brutality, pride, and healthy-wealthy theology, in the midst of all the gods, I call us to thank the Lord with our whole heart. Strength of soul comes rushing to us when there is a fragrance of worshipful surrender to God. Strength of soul comes when we adore the Lord and bow down before Him. Strength of soul comes when thanks to God is directed toward His steadfast love, His mercy and His faithfulness. Strength of soul comes when we exalt above all things, God’s Name and God’s Word. Strength of soul comes when our thanksgiving turns to singing. If the Lord’s enemies, v. 4—the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Moabites and the Amorite kings can repent and give God thanks, hearing of God’s words and singing of His ways, giving God great glory as Nebuchadnezzar once did, how much more should we give God thanks and praise. As a child, we sang, “The birds up in the treetop sing their song, the angels chant their chorus all day long; the flowers in the garden blend their hue, so why shouldn’t I, why shouldn’t you, praise Him too?” Secondly, there’s another ingredient that gives us strength of soul.”

**FOR A STRONG SOUL, WE MUST KNOW HOW TO CRY OUT TO THE LORD TO INCREASE OUR SOUL STRENGTH.** (II.) Notice Psalm 138: 3.

“On the day I called, You answered me; my strength of soul You increased.” Like a driver that notices his gas gauge is on empty, it’s time to stop immediately for a fill-up. Keep your finger on the text. I said cry, but the ESV says call. It’s both a cry and a call. The Hebrew word is **qara**. Qara means to call or cry out in an

intentional confrontation. It means to address by name. It means to call out loudly, to summon to our side, and to cry out. Of the 735 times this Hebrew word is used in scripture, 98 times translators translate qara as cry or cry out. David is so well captured in the Vineyard song, “Good to Me.” The words are: I cry out, For Your hand of mercy to heal me. I am weak, and I need Your love to free me. Oh, Lord, my Rock, My strength in weakness, Come rescue me, oh Lord. You are my hope, Your promise never fails me. And my desire is to follow You forever. For You are good, For You are good, For You are good to me. For You are good, For You are good, For You are good to me.” Don’t say, “I am waiting for a sign to know what to do!” Cry out, call out, summon the Lord and He will give strength to your soul.

Notice the immediacy of the help we get when we cry out. Verse 3 states, “On the day I called—qara, You answered me.” The word for strength of soul is **rahab**. It means to embolden, to make sure of, to encourage with confidence. Beloved, when God speaks to us, others may take us for being proud or presumptuous. They may say we are foolish, that God hasn’t spoken to us at all. Beloved, when God speaks, persevere with strength of soul. You can say, “You answered me, Lord.” “On the day I cried out to you, You answered me.” God’s speaking to us in our spirit is His way of proving that His Spirit does bear witness with our spirits—Romans 8: 16. This strength of soul is a strength the world cannot give nor can they take it away.

This strengthening of our soul, **rahab** also means to urge severely. That is, its primary meaning. Cory Gardner told me this week that God strongly urged him to call someone and witness to them. This strong severe urgency doesn’t mean others must listen to us, or that they will heed our words, our warnings, our instructions or whatever God has spoken to us. We have no such promise, but we know in our souls, “Lord, You overcame my fears of being rebuffed, rebuked, or refused and I spoke what You told me.” That’s strength in our souls. What is urgent to God may not be urgent to us or to others. Yet, when the Lord speaks to us or answers us, the voice of the Holy Spirit of God cannot be silenced by running from it, denouncing it, ignoring it, disagreeing with it, rebuking it, or disobeying it. The voice of the Lord is insistent, consistent with the Word of God—not consistent with our culture or our understanding, and His voice is persistent over time. Time doesn’t change the mind or will of God. Ask Abraham and Sarah. A strong soul knows the voice of the Lord and will not listen to the voice of strangers. (John 10: 5) God the Holy Spirit has the trademark of never changing His mind. He will finally change our minds to obey Him, but we will not ever talk Him into changing His mind. He must bring us often to brokenness before Him before we will surrender our pride and surrender to His will and His voice. Then thirdly, there is a third ingredient that leads us to a strong soul. It is not just thanking God and singing to Him, and calling and crying out to Him. Thirdly,

### **FOR A STRONG SOUL, WE MUST HUMBLE OURSELVES BEFORE**

**GOD.** (III.) Notice Psalm 138: 6. “For though the Lord is high, He regards the lowly, but the haughty he knows from afar.” This is both Old and New Testament truth. James 4: 5 states, “God resists or opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Isaiah 57: 15 is also clear, mirroring David’s words. “For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose Name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.” Do you need a fill-up of strength from the Lord in your soul? Bow down low before Him. God keeps the proud at arms-length, but to the lowly, He gives grace. What does David mean that God regards the lowly? This Hebrew word **raah** means to behold and consider and view with respect, to perceive and observe and be aware of. Beloved, never say, “God doesn’t know or care.” That is so false about God. He raah’s us. He sees, He sees the root of our problems. God is right on top of our problems if we are humble, right there to help. But for the proud, God knows them from afar.

The Hebrew word for afar is **merchawq**. Merchawq means remote, aloof, a wide gap between, to recede from, to remove from that place, to be absent from a person, and it means from far, far away. It suggests the picture of God moving or running away from the proud. The picture is found in Lamentation 1: 16, when Judah was under God’s discipline and Jeremiah cried out, “For these things I weep, my eyes flow with tears, for a comforter is far—merchawq from me...for an enemy has prevailed.” This reminds me of the survival of the fittest in nature. Herb Caen in the San Francisco Chronicle wrote, “Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn’t matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle: When the sun comes up, you’d better be running.” I understand nature’s dilemma, but my hope is in the Lord. Beloved, we must not wait until we are attacked by the enemy to think about the strategy we will use to escape the enemy of our soul. I am giving us a strategy today. Thank the Lord, sing to the Lord, call out to the Lord, cry to the Lord, humble yourself before the Lord—that’s strength of soul. That’s resisting the devil. James 4: 7 is clearly speaking to those who are humble saying, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Fourthly,

### **FOR A STRONG SOUL, WE MUST MUST LEARN TO WALK IN THE MIDST OF TROUBLE, TRUSTING GOD FOR OUR DELIVERANCE.**

(IV.) Notice Psalm 138: 7-8. “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You preserve my life; You stretch out Your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand delivers me. The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me; Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of Your hands.” David is calling for God not to stop doing what He is doing with His hands to save him. He

also says, “Your right hand delivers me.” Three times in vs. 7,8, we read about God’s safe hands In Jesus, we have a safe pair of hands. Edwin van der Sar, goalkeeper for the Manchester United Soccer team has possessed the safest pair of hands in the record book. Edwin kept the soccer ball from entering his team’s goal for 1, 302 minutes, the world record in one season. That means that for almost 15 games of 90 minutes each, no one was able to score even one goal against his team while he guarded the goalposts. Nevertheless, one goal by an opposing team in March of 2009 ended his record. David knew he had the safest hands for all eternity. God won’t let anything slip through His fingers. In verse 7, he wrote, “You stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and Your right hand delivers me...Do not forsake the work of your hands.”

Notice the deliverance of God isn’t deliverance from having to walk in the midst of trouble. God’s preservation of our lives physically and spiritually is smack dab, in the midst of trouble, by His steadfast love that endures forever. We walk in the midst of the wrath of the enemy. Do we ever fall? Yes! Do we ever give up? Yes. Are we ever found in fetters? Yes! So how does God fulfill His purpose for you and me? Zach Williams said it so well in his song I love to sing with him. I turn this song up when it plays on the radio. “If you’ve been walking the same old road for miles and miles, If you’ve been hearing the same old voice tell the same old lies, If you’re trying to fill the same old holes inside, There’s a better life, There’s a better life. If you’ve got pain *He’s a pain-taker.* If you feel lost *He’s a way maker.* If you need freedom or saving, *He’s a prison-shaking Savior.* If you’ve got chains *He’s a chain breaker.* We’ve all searched for the light of day in the dead of night. We’ve all found ourselves worn out from the same old fight. We’ve all run to things we know just aren’t right. But there’s a better life; There’s a better life.” Zach Williams is right. Let me say it again. How do we find strength for our souls in these difficult days? Thank the Lord with your whole heart. Sing before all the gods and idols of this world—sing your praise to the Lord. Bow down before the Lord. Give thanks to His Name. Give thanks for His Word. Call out, cry out and summon the Lord to strengthen you. Listen for His voice and accept His answer. Get low before the Lord. Don’t be proud and find God far away. Walk willingly in the midst of all your trouble. God will preserve your life. His right hand will deliver you. You’re immortal here until your work is done. Let God fulfill His purpose in you. Cry out for Him to never take His hand off you—to never forsake the work of His hands in your life. Now stand up with strength of soul and be counted for Jesus. He’s counting on you. Amen.