

My Strength And My Song

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, we read together from Isaiah, from Exodus 15, Isaiah 12, and we just sang from Psalm 118. And as I mentioned, there's a line that comes up in all of these passages.
- You see it there on the screen. That's what we're going to focus on today. This great phrase, the Lord is my strength and my song, He has become my salvation. And you see it in Exodus 15.
- You see it again in verse 2 of Isaiah 12, and we just sang it together in verse 14 of Psalm 118. Now that's going to be our title, my strength and my song.
- And it's a beautiful phrase for us to think about. And as we think about that together, I want us to notice that there's three key things that this phrase does.
- And so they're going to be our three points today. This phrase points backwards. It points forwards and it points inwards. And so we're going to look at these together one by one.
- [1 : 0 0] So first of all, in terms of pointing backwards, I want us to start by going back to Exodus. And Exodus is really the great moment of deliverance in the Old Testament.
- Israel, the nation of Israel, had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. God called Moses to lead them out of slavery.
- So Moses had to confront the Egyptian king Pharaoh and then lead the people out into freedom. But it was not an easy process. It wasn't straightforward.
- Pharaoh refused to let them go. And if you were to read Exodus chapter 7 through to chapter 12, you would all about the 10 plagues that were poured out upon Egypt, culminating in the first Passover where the firstborn children of the Israelites were protected from the severe judgment that fell on the Egyptians, all because Pharaoh kept on refusing to let the people go.
- Finally, Israel escaped. But just after Israel left Egypt, Pharaoh changes his mind. He decides to pursue them and quickly the Israelites are cornered.
- [2 : 1 0] They've escaped Egypt. They're moving towards the Red Sea. The Egyptians start to pursue them and they find themselves trapped. In front of them is the sea that they can't get past. And behind them, they can hear the chariots of the Egyptians pursuing them, coming to attack them.
- And in that moment, all the people of Israel despaired and they thought the whole thing was a massive mistake. And we read about that in Exodus 14.
- They said, why did you take us out of Egypt? It would have been far better for us just to have stayed as slaves than for us to come out here and to die in the wilderness.
- And so they're despairing. They can see that their situation is hopeless in their center. Moses, why did you do this to us? And Moses replies with the beautiful words of verses 13 to 14 says, fear not, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today.
- For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you and you only and you have only to be silent.

[3 : 16] And then we read about the amazing deliverance of how God sent a wind part of the sea. They were able to pass through and they escaped to safety.

In response to that deliverance, Moses and the Egyptian, Moses and the Israelites sing a song. And that whole song is captured in Exodus 15.

One to 19, we just read the first couple of verses. And in that song, they sing this beautiful line, the Lord is my strength and my song.

He has become my salvation. And so in its first and original context, this phrase here, the Lord is my strength and my song.

He's become my salvation. It's used to look back. They're standing on the other side of the Red Sea. They have been rescued and they are looking back, seeing just how much God has done for them, marveling at his amazing deliverance.

[4 : 16] So they're looking back. The phrase is pointing the Israelites back to what God has done. And there's a few important points that that little phrase teaches us in this moment that I want us just to unpack a little bit.

And perhaps the most important in terms of the immediate context of the Israelites here escaping Egypt is that everything that's happening, everything that's taking place in terms of their escape and their deliverance and their rescue, it's all God's doing.

And so Moses and the Israelites aren't standing on the other side thinking, we did it. They're standing there saying, God did it. God is the one who has rescued us.

They were in a situation of total despair. They were powerless and hopeless, but God intervened and God delivered them. And so all the praise that they're giving is all directed to the Lord.

They sang the song to the Lord, I will sing to the Lord, the Lord's misdeed, the Lord's mis-song. It's all directed towards God because he's the one who's done it all.

[5 : 21] And as they do that, give that praise, Moses uses three words that are so helpful for us because they all begin with S, which is very nice and easy to remember.

It talks about my strength, my song and my salvation. And we can just learn a little bit if we unpack each one. The Lord is their strength.

Now, up to this point in Exodus, the big question has been who's stronger, Pharaoh or God? And that's the big confrontation that's taking place.

And outward appearances are definitely on the Egyptian side. Egypt at this time was the kind of global superpower, certainly of that part of the world. They're the slave masters. They're the ones with chariots, horses.

And Pharaoh was treated like a God, like a divine figure. And the Israelites, as these kind of pure oppressed slaves, had nothing in comparison in terms of outward appearances.

[6 : 17] But God is on their side. God is on their side. And in rescuing them from Egypt, God gives a magnificent display of his strength.

So the Egyptians, they've got hundreds of horses and chariots. God has got the wind and the sea at his disposal. And he demonstrates the fact that his resources are limitless.

His authority is absolute. His power is unstoppable. And in this moment, it's reminding us just how big God is. And Pharaoh, in all his power, with all his resources, is actually pathetic compared to God and the strength that he has.

The Lord's their strength. The Lord is also their song. I love the way these two things are combined, strength and song together, because strength recognizes that God is unmatched, that he's powerful, unstoppable.

But song emphasizes that he's also the one in whom they find their joy and their hope and their peace. He's the one that gives them all the satisfaction and fulfillment that they need.

- [7 : 28] And it's so important to remember that in one level, when you go through the book of Exodus, one of the things that it's revealing is that God is awesome.
- And maybe we could even say at one level, it's revealing that God is terrifying. Because in all his glory and majesty and strength, he's unapproachable.
- There's something overwhelming about that. And there's this recognition throughout the whole of Exodus that God is not to be messed with. And I remember getting a weak glimpse of that in my former life as an engineer, because sometimes when we were engineering, we would go to jobs and we would have to lift something very, very, very heavy.
- So we would go, for example, to the power station where, I don't know if you know if you've got an alternator on your car, the alternator in your car is about this big. During the power station, the alternators on the engine are about this big.
- They're huge. And we had to go and remove an alternator. And there's a massive crane system built into the power station. You go and you lift this alternator and you realize you're like, wow, that crane is so cool.
- [8 : 34] And then you realize, well, I have to be so careful. Because there's 10 tons of steel hanging on the end of this crane. If I put my finger in the wrong place, then it's gone.
- And you realize, well, this is awesome, but I have to be careful. And that's a tiny glimpse, a tiny glimpse of what approaching God is like, especially in the context of Exodus.
- And it's so important that our understanding of God includes this, that there is just, when we say that God is strong, we are realizing he is unbelievably strong.
- And I have to be careful. And he's not someone to be messed around with. So Exodus is teaching us this, it's showing us how strong God is.
- And it would be so easy in that context for the Israelites' response to God to always be one of kind of cowering in fear and be crippled by the thing, well, we just can't, we almost need to run away from God.
- [9 : 42] And yet that's not the case. And Moses' words here show that that's not the case. Because yes, God is their strength, but he's also their song. He's the one that they find joy and delight in.
- He's the one who puts a massive smile on their face because of everything that he's done for them. And all of that is because he's become their salvation, he's their strength, their song, he's become their salvation.
- And it's important to note there's a progression in the verse here, so you can see the Lord is, my strength, the Lord is, is implied there, you can't see it, but it's implied, is my song, he has become my salvation.
- So you've got that progression towards salvation becoming a reality. And I think that's echoing something that Moses said earlier in the chapter, because if you look, you can see the correspondence.
- When Moses reassures the people in 14:13 to 14, he says, stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord. So he's basically saying stand firm, you're going to see the salvation of the Lord.
- [10 : 43] And then when they sing back their song, they're like, yeah, we saw it. He has become my salvation. What was anticipated has now become an amazing reality.
- And the great point being emphasized is that it's all because of God. And we can draw some important points of application from that. And what I want us to say is that all of this needs to shape our theology.

When I say it needs to shape our theology, what I mean is that it needs to shape our understanding of God. Your understanding of God and my understanding of God needs to be shaped by this. So when you think of God, you need to think of strength.

And not just like strong, like, oh, yeah, he's quite strong, but strength that is off the scale, the most powerful, most incomparable, most inexhaustible strength that you can think of.

That's the level of strength that that that is taking us sort of close to the level that God's at. And strength is utterly mind blowing.

[11 : 55] But you also need to think when you think of God, you need to think of song. You need to think of the most joyful, most uplifting, most melodious, most inspiring song you can imagine.

So think of the absolute favorite song that you have, the song that just fills your heart with joy. That's the song that connects with you, that the song is just the most real to you and giving you that inspiration that that music and song can give.

That's a glimpse of what God is like. He gives that joy and peace and meaning that nothing else can give.

He's not this kind of, he's not just this strong robotic force, but he's actually the source of everything that means anything important to us.

He's our song. And when you think of God, you need to think of salvation that and all there's so many things that we can unpack under that word salvation.

[12 : 53] God is the rescuer. He has come to rescue Egypt when they were totally helpless. God is the healer. He's come to restore them from all that they've suffered and endured.

He's come to defend them, to protect his people. He's come to fight for them. He is the greatest warrior of all. All of these concepts, rescue, healing, restoration, defense, fighting a warrior, all of these lie under that great word salvation.

The Lord is my strength and my song. He's become my salvation. I want everyone to spend a wee bit of time this week just meditating on those words.

And so when you have time this week, whether it's today or later, just please go back to one of these passages and just let these words go over and over in your mind again as you think more about God.

It's all pointing us backwards to the wonder of what he's done. But it's not just pointing us backwards. It's also pointing us forwards. And that takes us to Isaiah chapter 12.

[13 : 59] So this is about 700 years later. So from Exodus 15 to Isaiah 12 were jumping about 700 years or so, and a lot has happened in that time since Israel came through the Red Sea.

They spent 40 years in the wilderness where they received God's law through the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. They built a tabernacle and then eventually a temple where God would dwell and where they would approach him to worship him.

They conquered the promised land. They settled in the territories allotted to the different tribes of Israel, and eventually a royal family was established and David was their greatest king.

And in terms of Old Testament timeline, David's an easy one to remember because he lived about a thousand BC. So David's a good reference point to have. Isaiah is about 720 BC.

So you're 200, 300 years later, about 700 years or so after the Exodus. In the time of David, everything was looking great.

[14 : 59] It didn't take long for everything to start to go wrong. And when David's grandson became king, the kingdom of Israel divided. You had the northern kingdom, which was called Israel, the southern kingdom called Judah.

First they divided. Before long they were at war. Everything began to disintegrate. And most seriously of all, people began to turn away from God. They were unfaithful to him and unfaithful to God's covenant relationship that he had established with them.

By the time Isaiah became a prophet, the northern kingdom is about to fall apart. It's about to be conquered and destroyed by the Assyrian Empire just to the north of them. Or a little bit further than just to the north of them.

And so it's kind of ironic that in Exodus you have Israel escaping from a global superpower. By the time Isaiah becomes a prophet, they're about to fall under the grip of the new global superpower again.

Isaiah's prophesying in the midst of everything falling apart. He's prophesying judgment against the northern kingdom. And so if you read chapters 8 to 11 of Isaiah, which you can do later in the week if you want, you'll read about how God is going to use the Assyrian Empire to bring judgment on to Israel because of the way in which they've turned away from God.

[16 : 14] But in the midst of that judgment, in these chapters 8 to 11 of Isaiah, you get some of the most well-known and important prophecies about the Savior that God is going to send.

Here are some of the examples. Isaiah 7.14, therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign, behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, they shall call his name Emmanuel. Isaiah 9.6, for to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 11, there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, a branch from his roots shall appear, the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of Counselor and might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.

And all of these passages, of course, are talking about Jesus. They're what we would call messianic prophecies, they're pointing forward to the coming of the Messiah, God's anointed King and Savior.

So in the midst of the judgment, there's hope, that's always the pattern you see in the prophecies, alongside judgment there's hope, one day God's salvation is going to come.

[17 : 31] And what Isaiah 12 does, is that it takes the words of Exodus 15 and applies them to what's going to happen in Jesus, because you really, it says, you will say in that day, in the day when God's Savior comes, I'll give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away that you might comfort me, behold God is my salvation I will trust and I will not be afraid for the Lord, God is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation.

In other words, if Exodus 15 is looking back, Isaiah 12 is using the same words to look forward. Exodus 15 is a response to what God has done. Isaiah 12 is an anticipation of what God is going to do.

And all of this is showing us how the whole Bible is one big, amazing story and plan woven together across the ages of history, as God works out his great plan to save his people.

That plan is all about Jesus, it all culminates in him. And Isaiah 12 is using these same words to talk about what's going to happen when Jesus comes to save us.

And that's teaching us such an important lesson about how we understand how the Bible fits together. The Bible, as you know, is split into the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the Old Testament, really the big, massive important event is the Exodus, when God's people are rescued from Egypt, but like everything in the Old Testament, it's just a shadow.

[19 : 01] It's a sign pointing us to what God is really going to do. It's pointing us to what's going to be accomplished through the coming of Jesus.

And what that means and what that results in is that when you go to read the Gospels and you read about Jesus' life recorded, one of the fascinating things you discover is that there are so many aspects of Jesus' life and mission that echo the Exodus.

And I want to give you a couple of examples. So at the Exodus, they're standing at the Red Sea, God sends a wind in the sea, obeys him. Jesus, on the Sea of Galilee, is woken up when there's a storm.

He rebukes the wind in the sea and says, be still, and the wind ceased, and there was great calm. In the Exodus, they came to Mount Sinai, Moses was taken up to the mountain, there the law was given in Matthew 5.

Jesus went up a mountain and delivered the Sermon on the Mount when he explained how the law of God is to be understood in his kingdom and in the era of the New Covenant. In the wilderness, God provided manna from heaven, bread for the people to eat.

[20 : 07] Jesus comes saying, truly it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my father who gave it, and he says, I am actually the bread of life. And all of that was actually pointing to me and to the provision that I will provide.

In John 3, he talks about how Moses lifted up the Sermon, the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. And when you come to the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus again goes up the mountain and the cloud of God's presence that accompanied the Israelites as they exited Egypt comes down and Moses and Elijah appear and they actually speak about Jesus's departure, which is referring to his resurrection.

The Greek word used for departure is the word Exodus. And you see it all tying in together so magnificently.

And that's teaching us some crucial lessons for us. It's telling us that stuff that's happening to the Israelites as they are saved, the things that they experience, and the things that we're learning from them in the moment of their deliverance from Egypt is teaching us lessons about what happens when we come to faith in Jesus and teaching us about the salvation that he provides.

There's two crucial things I want to just unpack with you. The first is that it's reminding us that in the gospel, as we trust in Jesus, whether you are a Christian or not yet a Christian, as we trust in him in the gospel, the Lord is your strength.

[21 : 43] And that has the absolutely crucial lesson that everything rests completely on God's strength. The whole gospel rests on his strength.

It is all about the fact that Jesus has come to save us. He does everything and his life and mission is a display of his unstoppable strength. So he comes and he performs miracles.

He confronts enemies. He resists temptation. He endures brutal treatment. He suffers agony on the cross. He dies for our sins. He rises again in total victory and it all shows how unbelievably strong he is.

And it's teaching us that when it comes to your salvation, God will do the fighting for you. And no matter how hopeless or helpless you feel, it's reminding us that God is absolutely strong enough to save you.

And all this display of strength in the Exodus is just a glimpse of the astounding strength of God. And if you're a Christian or if you become one, all of that strength is being channeled into saving you and into holding you and into making sure that you are safe and secure forever.

[22 : 56] And it's all an amazing reminder that in the gospel, you never have to be strong enough. And it's so important to remember that because so often we think, you know, I'm not strong enough.

I don't know enough. I'm not good enough. And there's no way God would want me. I'm not going to be able to sustain it.

You never have to be strong enough. You never, ever have to be strong enough because the gospel rests completely on the fact that the Lord is your strength.

But the second thing that this applies so, so powerfully is that in the gospel, not only is the Lord your strength, he's your song. And that's reminding us that being saved by Jesus fills us with joy and peace and thanksgiving and praise.

The fact that the Exodus is a shadow of the gospel is telling us that the way the Israelites felt when they were saved from the Egyptians is a glimpse of how it feels to come to know Jesus.

[24 : 01] And that's so important for us to remember coming to faith in Jesus and living every day of our lives in relationship with him. It's just so good.

It brings so much joy and meaning and peace to life. It brings a satisfaction to life that absolutely nothing else can bring. And if anyone here is not yet a Christian, and as we think about our outreach weekend in August, as we want to go out to your community and tell everybody about Jesus, one of the biggest reasons we want to do that, one of the biggest reasons we want people to become Christians is because knowing Jesus is utterly brilliant.

It's just fantastic to know Jesus. And we want you to have that. And we want our village to have that. He's our song. He's the one who gives us so much joy and peace.

Now, when I say that, some of you who are Christians might be thinking, I don't feel like that today. I've actually had a really hard week, and I'm struggling with doubts and fears and uncertainty.

And that is something that every Christian feels from time to time. Being a Christian doesn't mean that every day is a bed of roses. But sometimes the thing that we are in danger of doing is that when we are struggling and when things feel like they're going wrong, we forget what we have in the gospel.

[25 : 27] We lose sight of everything that God has done for us in Jesus. And what we need to remember is that even in the midst of struggles, you still have a song.

And the mistake I've made in my life many times and the mistake other people make, I think, in their lives is that we just need that song in the background. So sometimes you can be listening to music, and it's just in the background.

So whether you're in the kitchen and you've got the radio on, it's just in the background. You're not really thinking about it. You're in the car and the music's just in the background. It's there, but it's just in the background you're not paying attention to. Sometimes if you're like me, you get into the car and the power of love by Huey Lewis and the news comes in the playlist and you crank the volume right up and you are listening to that song and that song is filling you with joy and you're like, oh, this is great.

This is what I needed. And so often with the song of the gospel, we leave it in the background. It's like, yeah, I've got Jesus, but he's just in the background. There's too much other noise, too much distraction in my life.

We need to go and we need to crank up that song. We need to listen again to the promises of God fulfilled in Jesus. We need to wash our hearts and minds and you in just all the fullness of His promise and love.

[26 : 41] And actually you can use worship music to do this, whether it's Psalms or hymns that you enjoy. We need that to listen and to be reminded of just the amazing joy and hope that we have in the gospel.

The Lord is my strength and my song. He's become my salvation. Isaiah is applying these words directly to Jesus. It's pointing us to everything that we have in him.

So it's pointing forwards, pointing backwards. It's pointing forwards. It's pointing inwards. Time is running out. Very, very quick.

I've often said that there's many wonderful big words in the Bible and there are, but the most wonderful words in the Bible are the little ones. And there's a wonderful little word that appears three times.

My strength, my song, my salvation. My strength, my song, my salvation.

[27 : 40] And it's all reminding us that the colossally big theology that lies behind this verse is actually applied to us all at the most personal level.

So the God whose strength is greater than any other, whose song is sweeter than all others, whose salvation is total and irrevocable, he's yours if you're trusting in Jesus.

And he can be yours if you haven't yet come to faith. You can come to that magnificent God and you can trust in him and you can say he's mine.

Two very, very quick things I'm going to say. Very quick things. One lesson for those of us who are believers, one who are not yet believers. For those of us who are believers, what we need to recognize is sometimes we can have a mindset where we have almost like only half a salvation.

So sometimes we might view God as our strength, but not as our song. And what I mean by that is we think, well, God's really important. I know that I need him. I know that I depend on him.

[28 : 51] And ultimately he's nothing, you know, he's the most important thing in life. He's the one that we turn to in times of need. And I recognize that he is God, but he doesn't give us much joy.

And instead we just see God as kind of intimidating and threatening. And for joy we go elsewhere. And so we have God as our strength, but not really as our song. Sometimes we do the other way around.

I'd like to have God be our song, but not our strength. So yes, we might kind of be very positive about God. I think, well, I'm delighted to have God in my life, but actually I don't really need him. And when it comes to big decisions, I'll trust my own judgment and I'll be the one to make judgment on certain.

I'll set the terms for my relationship. Not really going to admit to any weaknesses. And I'm definitely not going to surrender my whole life to serving him. And it's so easy to fall into either of these mistakes where God is maybe our strength.

We recognize he's the one that we need, but he doesn't give us much joy or for him to be the one we're very happy with, but actually not really relying on in our lives.

[29 : 59] And the danger is, is that if you have only half a salvation like this, if God is your strength, but not your song, then you're going to be a miserable Christian. And if God is your song, but not your strength, then you're going to be an ineffective Christian.

The gospel rests on Jesus as both strength and song. And that whole package is what lies at the heart of the salvation that he gives to us.

So I want you to think the Lord's my strength and my song, the two always go hand in hand. The last thing I want to say is for those who are not yet believers or who are maybe not yet sure, and this is maybe the most important thing I should say, which is why I shouldn't have left it so rushed.

And what we need to recognize is that everyone has a strength and a song.

So we all need strength from something. And we all need a song to find inspiration and comfort in everybody. Everybody has something that is their strength and something that is their song.

[31 : 08] And the question is, if that is not Jesus, what is it? And so where do you look when you feel weak and overwhelmed and out of your depth?

Do you look to somebody, a parent, a spouse, a friend? Do you look to your wallet to find by your way of difficulty? Do you look to an ideology or a politician? Do you look to alcohol or to pornography?

Do you hide behind anger and aggression? Where do you go when you feel weak? Where's your strength? And where do you find your song? Where do you go when you feel flat, when you feel low?

Where do you go? Do you look for distraction on TV? Do you look for victory in sport? Do you look for approval among classmates or peers or colleagues? Do you bury yourself in social media?

Do you buy something new? Where do you turn to find joy? Because the world around us is offering us loads of strengths and loads of songs, and we all have them.

[32 : 11] And the absolutely crucial lesson is this. If your strength in your song is something other than Jesus, then it can never, ever become your salvation.

It can never save you. Because only God can do that. And if you say to money or popularity or success or reputation or alcohol or whatever, you are my strength in my song, then it's going to rob you of salvation.

And if you're in the grip of any of these things, you will say, you are my strength. So it's not the Lord. If you say to whatever else you are my strength and my song, he has become my ruin.

That's a hard thing to say, and it's a hard thing to hear. But the most important discovery we will ever make is that it is only Jesus who can save us, and when he is your strength and your song, he will be your salvation and it will be the most wonderful thing you will ever discover.

So please, please think very, very hard about that. I hope that every single one of us goes to bed tonight saying, the Lord is my strength and my song.

[33 : 52] He's become myself. Amen. Amen.