

Psalm 32

by Carl Armerding

Carl Armerding's sermon on Psalm 32 emphasizes God's salvation and protection amidst life's challenges and the power of prayer in the believer's life.

Duration: 34:02

Scripture: Psalm 3:1-5, Matthew 27:22, Romans 4:4, Romans 7:24-25

Topics: "Psalms"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the challenges faced by believers in a hostile world. Despite the outnumbering of believers by their foes, the speaker assures that victory is certain. The speaker shares a personal anecdote about a conversation with a fellow student who questioned the speaker's association with fundamentalists. The speaker emphasizes the importance of answered prayer as a defense and apologetic for the faith. The sermon also highlights the power of the Word of God as a shield and protection in the believer's life.

Transcript

Meditation this evening, I'm asking you to turn, please, to the Book of the Psalms. I'd like to talk a little bit about Psalm 3, the third psalm. I'm going to read the title of this psalm, and as I've chosen this, I'm not unmindful of the fact that I have spoken on this psalm in other places in this city, but I, in keeping with the subject which has been assigned to us for today, the subject of salvation, I would like to take the last verse of this psalm as my text.

But let me read the whole psalm, including the title. The psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son, Lord, how are they increased that trouble me? Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which save my soul.

There's no help for him in God, but thou, O Lord, art a shield for me, my glory and the lifter up of my head. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. I laid me down and slept.

I awaked, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me. Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God, for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone.

Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord. Thy blessing is upon thy people.

Selah. Those of you who were present this morning to hear Dr. Crichton will recall that he spoke on the three tenses. There is a sense in which we believers in the Lord Jesus Christ can say we are saved, saved by grace.

There is a sense in which we shall yet be saved according to the eighth chapter of Romans. We are saved in hope of that glorious day when our bodies as well as our spirit and soul will feel the effect of the wonderful work of our Father on Calvary's cross. But in between these two there's another tense of salvation and that's the present tense.

It is of this that I want to speak a little bit tonight because I think it's a very necessary word. One of the first things you become aware of after you declare yourself on the side of the Lord Jesus, you suddenly discover that you're living in a very hostile world. And this has been true of the children of God from the very beginning, way back to the days of Cain and Abel, and all along the line.

You find that God's children have had to live in a hostile scene. And yet it is this very thing that the Lord Jesus said would happen. He said, In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

But we have two enemies. We have one from within, that's ourselves. And this is a great struggle.

This is something that gets some people down so low that they wonder whether they're going to be saved. And it's all because they don't finish reading the chapter and read on into the next chapter in Romans. Because at the very close of Romans 7, the Apostle Paul asks the question, Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ.

There is deliverance. So I'm not going to speak about that side today, because that will probably be emphasized more tomorrow, when we talk about sanctification. But this evening, to talk about that present tense of salvation, that deliverance from things that are hostile to us.

And according to the title of this psalm, you'll notice that this comes pretty close to home. Every time I read this title, I heave a sigh of relief that I never had an experience like this. I have only one son living.

One is in heaven. But I'm thankful to say that the son whom God has given me never treated me like this. When he drove his father from his home and from his throne and from his family, and actually defiled his father, one can't think of a more despicable, heartbreaking thing than that.

You wonder sometimes how anybody could get anything out of an experience like that, except by passing through it. You say, what good does that do me? We read stories like this, and we say, well, this is terrible. But it is out of an experience just like that, that the psalmist got this beautiful third psalm.

And I wonder sometimes if Jonah had this psalm in mind, because he used the very same words at the close of his prayer, down in the whale's belly, that you have at the close of this one, when he said, salvation is of the low. But you'll notice that immediately you get into the psalm itself, and you find that the psalmist not only has one enemy, but he has a lot of them. He says, Lord, how have they increased that trouble me? Many there be which rise up against me.

Many there be. Notice the emphasis on the numbers here. This is overwhelming, isn't it? When you remember that we Christians are really in the minority.

You study comparative religions and study missions, and you discover that we Christians are in the minority. We're hopelessly outnumbered by non-Christian faiths, as well as those who have no faith whatever. Hopelessly outnumbered.

If we're ever going to win because of numbers, we're lost now. We've lost the battle. So that when we think of these hosts of enemies against us, we say to ourselves, what's the use? What's the use? But we're going to see, dear friends, that in spite of this fact, that we're facing a hostile foe, and he's there in numbers far outnumbering our own.

Nevertheless, we're assured a victory. I remember as a student, in my student days, I was witnessing to a fellow student, who by the way was the son of a missionary but he didn't share his father's faith. In fact, he said to me one day, he said, don't you know that you've come up here on this hill? Don't you know that you've come up here for a liberal education? I said, yes.

Well, he said, how much longer are you going to fool around with this? He says, come on, climb on the bandwagon. Get with the crowd. I said, Bob, you know the story of the crucifixion? Oh, of course, he said, every Christian knows that.

Well, I said, since you know it so well, you'll be ready to answer the next question. Tell me, who was right at Calvary? The majority or the minority? Who was it that set away with him away with him crucifixion? It was the majority. And I said, Bob, I traveled with that crowd long enough, even though I was saved as a teenager, I traveled long enough with that crowd.

I may not be with the majority today. He had no answer for that. But you know, it's not only the numbers that the enemy would threaten us with, it's what he says.

Do you ever notice this discouraging language? It says here, verse two, many there be which say of mine, there's no help for him in God. Much as they say even God can't help him. You know, this kind of discouraging, pessimistic language, when I read some of these modern day novels, such as the works of John, perhaps some of you know his book called No Exit, or some of Camus' works, and every last one of them impresses me with the hopelessness of their situation.

They have no hope to offer. As a matter of fact, John Paul Sartre's book No Exit would almost drive one to suicide if he didn't have any real hope. And here they give expression to this in saying it about you and me.

And you know the mischief of it is sometimes, as one of the great politicians, I wouldn't call him a great man, I'm referring to Adolf Hitler, peace be to his ashes, who said you repeat a lie often enough and people will believe it, and the enemy repeats this lie to us, there's no help for him, there's no help for him in God. But you know at this point in the psalm we have that little word selah again, which we said the other day, stands for give your time to think this thing over that you've just heard. And then comes a tremendous change.

How I like the contrast in that third verse, but. Oh, these conjunctions of contrast, how wonderful they are. But thou, you bring God into the picture.

And three things are said here about God which I want to pass on to you tonight, and the first of these is, but thou, O Lord, art a shield for me. I want you to notice, friends, it's not only that he gives me a shield. For many years in reading that verse in Ephesians 6, where it says above all taking the shield of faith, I thought that that shield was made of my faith.

And one day when I needed the shield very badly I thought I'd use that. But I discovered to my disappointment that my faith was more like a sieve than a shield, full of holes. So I looked at this verse again.

Maybe I haven't read it correctly. Yes, I'd read it correctly. I consulted my Greek testament to see whether there was any difference there.

And I discovered very easily, quite suddenly, that this was in the genitive case, as we say in English, and that I could translate this, above all taking faith's shield. Not too easy to say, especially if you have a little lisp in your tongue, you know. But this is the force of it.

It's not a shield made of faith, but it's the shield that faith takes. It's faith's shield. And way back in the fifteenth chapter of the book of Genesis we have God saying this to Abram, Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

Somebody said, but how can you use the Lord as a shield? Well, I had a good illustration of that some years ago up in western Montana. A dear brother up there, who was faithfully ministering the Word, was invited to a rather small town. He got there on a Saturday afternoon and went to the hotel where he was told there were accommodations for him.

And they told him his room number, and he went up to it and discovered as he looked around that there were no towels in the bathroom. So he lifted the receiver of the telephone and called the office, called the desk to say, there are no towels in my bathroom, I'd like to take a bath, and would you please attend to this? And the clerk apologized and said, well, I'm sorry, sir, we'll have a maid there in a few minutes with the towels. And sure enough, in a few minutes the maid came in with a towel draped over her arms, but instead of leaving the towels in the bathroom, she sat down on a chair and proceeded to engage the guest in a conversation.

And it was very evident to him by the turn the conversation was taking, which was rather one-sided, that she was there for no good purpose. And when he sensed what she was after, and I'll let you guess for yourselves, he didn't know just what to do, whether to call the desk again and say, I ask you to remove this woman from my room. But in quick thinking he thought, if I do that, she'll probably accuse me of making the advances.

So he reached down in his briefcase and he pulled out his Bible. He says, you know, I'd like to tell you what the Lord Jesus Christ means to me. His towels in the bathroom in thirty seconds.

What had he done? He had used the Lord as his shield. Just as simple as that. He didn't even have to begin to talk.

Just to show this book. And dear friends, that in itself sometimes is so powerful and so wonderful. I had this experience not a few weeks ago over in Switzerland, returning from a visit to the Middle East.

We all had to be frisked at the airport in Zurich in Switzerland. I'd gone through this experience on my way out. So I was quite prepared for these men.

I had to hand over my baggage and I opened my coat before I actually got in the room where the man was going to look me over. And he looked at me for a moment. He says, I think I can believe you.

You can go. So I started out. But outside was a man going through my baggage.

He didn't know it was my bag until he looked at me. He had my Bible in his hand. He stuck it in there and put the... I wasn't frisked after that.

The word of God is a wonderful shield. When I first got my first automobile, it was an open car, four door. I conceived the idea of having a gospel text painted on each one of those four doors.

Door number one had all of sin that controlled the glory of God. Door number two had the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son cleansed from all sin. I had two more on the other side.

Insurance man called me up in town. He said, say, I hear you've bought a new car. I said, yes, I have.

He says, how about getting insured? I said, well, I'll bring the car down. If you think I need any insurance, I'll buy it. He came out and took one of them.

I could leave the key in that car. Nobody took it. But you know, there's more.

He's the lifter up of my head. I don't have to go down as one who's ashamed of his faith or to have the look of defeatism, but with a head up, not in pride, but looking forward as one who's unafraid of the world, thou art the lifter up of my head, and my glory, the one in whom I boast. You notice, dear friends, that all of these things here constitute a real defense? The Word of God, the Lord himself, he's our glory, the one in whom we boast, he's the lifter up of our head.

Yes, somebody says, now that's very wonderful, but how does it work out in practice? Well, in the next two verses, verses 4 and 5 and 6, you'll notice that the psalmist goes on to tell us something about his experience. And the very first thing he talks about is a thing that you and I should have been able to talk about very soon after we were saved. Notice what it says in verse 3, verse 4 rather, I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me.

You know, reduced to its simplest terms, it's just this, I prayed and he answered. You ever consider what a wonderful apologetic, what a wonderful defense answered prayer is? You know, people can argue themselves blue in the face, but when you point out how time after time God has answered prayer, and down the years now you multiply this as I can for more than sixty-five, sixty-six years knowing my Lord and Savior, what a wonderful record of answered prayer. But very early in my Christian experience, I had occasion to go to a doctor who was also an ordained Baptist minister.

I needed his help for my body, and the day I went to see him, the office was quite full of people. In those days, the doctor did his own reception work, and when he saw me in there, he knew me well and knew that I was at the end of the line. He disappeared into his office again, and presently he came out with a loose-leaf book.

He said, maybe you'd like to look over my prayer book while you're waiting. Prayer book? My parents were Lutherans, they had a prayer book. I still have the prayer book of the Episcopal Church, which we call the

Church of England, yes, and I read it frequently.

But I never knew of the Baptist having a prayer book. This was a new one on me, and when I saw that it was a loose-leaf book, I wondered even more. It was the kind of a book that you could buy in those days for two bits, I mean fifty cents.

It was just a small, cheap book. But as I looked through this book, it was the most wonderful book. It was absolutely unique.

At the top of the page, the doctor had written a prayer that he had prayed, and the date when he prayed it. And then he put down the dates when he repeated this prayer. And page after page, page after page, at the bottom of the page he wrote, answered such and such a day.

Dozens of pages. I said, when I got my chance to go in to see the doctor, I said, well, Dr. Brown, this is a very interesting book. I said, where'd you get the idea for this? You know, I was brought up in a school where you had to have scripture for everything like that, you know.

Where'd you get this? Well, he said, the Bible tells me to continue in prayer, and this is evidence I'm doing it. And watch in the same with Thanksgiving, and that's evidence I'm doing that. So he had two good scriptures for his prayer book.

Well, I said, I don't suppose you have much use for this except for your own personal enjoyment? Oh, he said, every once in a while. He said, I get a skeptic and an agnostic or even an atheist come in the office here. And he said, I like to keep them waiting and say to them, would you like to look over this prayer book while you wait? This is a tremendous apologetic.

And you know, dear friends, they can talk to you about all the mistakes in the Bible and all that sort of thing. Don't argue with them. Just tell them what God did for you.

But you say, brother, God doesn't always answer my prayers in the affirmative. That's true. I know something about that.

You know, you don't live more than four score years without discovering that God has more than one answer to prayer. Sometimes he says yes, sometimes he says no. Then again, he says, wait, you've heard that before.

I've had so many answers to prayer, but I've also had times when the Lord said no. What then? Ah, the next verse answers that question. Look at this, verse five.

I laid me down and slept, and I waked for what? The Lord. And you know, dear friends, sometimes this is even a better testimony than to say the Lord heard my prayers. If he didn't answer your prayer, but he gave you sustaining grace.

Wasn't that wonderful? That's exactly what he did for the Apostle Paul. He gave Paul a thorn in the flesh. And Paul sought him thrice, three times over.

He asked him to take it away, but he didn't. But he said, my grace is sufficient for thee in the providence of God. I had a most wonderful lady as my life companion for forty-seven and a half years.

For twenty-three of those years, she was an invalid. We often prayed about that, but the Lord didn't, wasn't pleased to remove the sickness. The doctors said after they diagnosed that she would be dead in two years, but she lived twenty-three.

And when I said to the doctor, how come? Did you miss your guess? No, he said she just had the will to live. And I remembered how one time when they had given her up, and she opened her eyes again and was coming back to life. And she said in her scotch, I'm no dead yet.

But God had given sustaining grace. And all through those twenty-three years, wonderful. You know, I wouldn't change him for anything in the world.

Beloved, don't ask the Lord to take away something that he's using for your blessing. It may be the very best thing that ever could happen. The Lord sustained me.

And then you notice in verse six, he has courage. He says, I'll not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about. You see, this is the fruit of that experience.

A man gets to the point where he's unafraid. You know, sometimes people wonder at you when you're unafraid. I remember as a young man down in Honduras as a missionary, my companion and I were stoned by a whole mob up in Colinas de Santa Barbara.

Thirty years later, it was my privilege to visit the field again. I visited my hometown in Santa Rosula. And in my audience that night was a man whose eyes fairly bored through me.

I like eye contact when I'm preaching. But I could hardly take it from this man. I tried to hide behind a bouquet that was on the table before me, but I couldn't get away from him.

And after the meeting, he came up, he said, did you at one time visit a place called Colinas de Santa Barbara? About 30 years ago, I said, yes, sir. All in Spanish, of course, this conversation. He said, you remember being stoned in Colinas de Santa Barbara? I said, oh, I could never forget it.

We heard them crying for our blood. He says, I was one of those that stoned you. And his face didn't register anything else.

I thought maybe he'd come to finish the job. Instead of that, he said to me, you know, after that, I went to a little place called Santa Cruz de Yohua. And I heard you preach again.

And he says, I can tell you the text that you preached on. And I was beginning to search my memory to see what that text might be. But he said it was the fourth chapter of Romans.

And I immediately remembered it was. He said that night the Lord spoke to me. I've been waiting 30 years to tell you.

Friends, how well repaid one was for such an experience as that. May I just address myself particularly to my younger friends here this evening. Are you wondering what's in it for you on the mission field in the service of our Lord and Savior? This little incident I've told you can be multiplied by hundreds.

If you're willing to give your life to him, he'll do it. And you'll have the courage of faith. And I said to this man after he told me all this, I said, Don Federico, what was it that impressed you, if anything did, when you were stoning us? He said the thing that impressed me was that you were absolutely without fear,

unafraid.

And thank God for every evidence of courage as one faces his foes. But you might think that the close of this psalm contradicts all we've said so far, because you notice in verse 7, verse 7 he gives us, Arrive, O Lord, and save me. What kind of salvation is he talking about now? He's not talking about salvation of his soul.

That's salvation in the past tense, you see. He's talking about salvation now, from these very things that are threatening him. O Lord, save me.

O my God, for thou hast, notice the tense of the verb here. We'll not go into the question about tense in the Hebrew language. It's somewhat different from our way of making the tense.

But we're going to leave it just the way it is here in this Authorized Version. Just as you've often heard, it was good enough for David and good enough for the Apostle Paul and good enough for me. And it is, too.

Thou hast smitten. I like that. I know some versions translate this, Thou wilt smite.

But I like to leave it just the way it is here. Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheekbone. Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.

What's the psalmist doing here? He's anticipating the victory. Because you can see he had these enemies all around him. As St. Peter puts it in his epistles, Your adversary the devil walketh about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

And how the enemy likes to frighten us with his speech and roaring, doesn't he? And here's one who can say, Lord, thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Thou hast already robbed him of the power to do anything to me. This recalls an incident out in California some years ago.

I was visiting a zoo, which they had at that time outside the city of Los Angeles. It's since been discontinued. But I like to go to a zoo and feel the safety of it, you know.

You see the animals behind the iron bars or otherwise with a moat between you and them so they can't get at you. You feel quite safe. It's wonderful, not only to look at these big elephants, but lions and tigers.

I feel perfectly safe. But I stood before the cage of a wildcat, and I was pondering this wildcat, wondering what in the world the Lord ever made wildcats for. He must have had a good reason, but he hasn't told me yet what it is.

But anyhow, while I was standing there wondering what good a wildcat could be, a man stepped into the cage from the back. He opened the door, and he had nothing in his hand but a broom. He closed the door behind him and started sweeping the cage out.

The wildcat was asleep in a corner of the cage. And I was watching this thing. The shivers were going down my back.

I guess where that cat is. When he got over where the cat was, he went down and laid somewhere else. Well, I said, then that cat must be tame.

Well, I said, if you're not brave and he's not tame. He said, he's old. He ain't got no teeth.

Now is the judgment of this world. Now is the Christ. Now is the Prince of Beloved.

Our enemy may be strong, but he is defeated. And I want you to go out of here tonight, God helping you with a note of victory in your heart, and be able to say in the language of the last verse, which is my text for this evening, Salvation is of the Lord. Yes, do I need help in my Christian life? Do I need help against the foes that rise up against me? Thank God I have it all in Him.

I have it all in Him. And there is no need for any one of us to live a defeated life. Every one of us can live victoriously because we're on the winning side.

Will you please turn to hymn number 407?

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