

Finding the Strength We Once Heard Of

by Carter Conlon

The sermon emphasizes finding strength in our weaknesses through faith in Christ and God's promises.

Duration: 36:54

Scripture: Psalm 132:9, Psalm 132:14-16, Luke 2:10-14, Romans 7:14-25

Topics: "Gods Strength", "Spiritual Surrender"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of finding strength in God, especially in times of weakness and struggles. It highlights the need to move from making promises in our own strength to relying on God's promises and power to bring about transformation in our lives. The message encourages a deep surrender to God, acknowledging our weaknesses and inviting Him to indwell us, leading us to victory and a life filled with joy and purpose.

Transcript

I was very tempted to entitle this message this morning the 2016 Part B, and it really is a New Year's message. And it's the year, this is the year when we're going to find the strength that we once heard of. That's the title of my message this morning, Finding the Strength That We Once Heard Of.

Psalm 132, please, if you go there in your Bibles with me, Psalm 132. Now, Father, I thank you, God, with all my heart for the strength that you are willing to give us as we yield our bodies to you as a sacrifice for your purposes on the earth. Thank you, Lord God, that you invite us even to pray, not in times of strength, but in times of weakness, that we may find the strength that we need to help in our time of need.

And so, God, I ask you to overshadow the frailty of this human body this morning, overshadow the frailties, Lord, of those of us who are listening, and give us the grace to hear. As you once said so many times, he who has the ears to hear, let him hear. So God, let us hear this day, God, that your word find a free course into the very center of who we are as the people of God on the earth.

Lord, I thank you for this with everything in me, in Jesus' name, amen. Psalm 132, finding the strength we once heard of, beginning at verse 9. Lord, remember David and all his afflictions, how he swore to the Lord and vowed to the mighty one of Jacob, surely I will not go into the chamber of my house or go up to the comfort of my bed. I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the mighty one of Jacob.

Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah, we found it in the fields of the woods. Let us go into his tabernacle, let us worship at his footstool. Arise, O Lord, to your resting place, you and the ark of your strength.

Let your priests be clothed with righteousness and let your saints shout for joy. Now in this psalm we find the type of every one of our journey, every person's journey to becoming all that God desires us to be and all that we once promised that we would be. Think back to how sincere you were when you first made those first promises to him and you asked him to set you free from all that formerly afflicted you.

Remember you said, God set me free and I'll serve you with all my heart. Set me free, Lord, and I will live for you all of my days. Set me free, God.

Touch my life and I won't do this anymore and I won't do that and I will do this and I will do that. And you made promises and they were sincere promises you made and many of you may remember those. Now this is really specific considering we're coming into a new year and it's the human tendency to make new promises as we come into a new year.

We promise things to ourselves to be a better husband, a better father, a better wife, a better friend, a better sister, better employee, only to find that we're incapable of fulfilling those things that we have promised. And all of our promises eventually bring us to a dead end, don't they? Everything that we try to do in our own strength and we find out that we're unable to do what we thought we would, we're unable to become what we thought we should, and we're unable to be what we believed we could. All of the things, these promises that came into our hearts and so we get to a point in our walk with God where we become deeply aware of how weak you and I really are.

And I know I'm speaking to people here this morning who have come into this house and you say, God, I can't make any promises to you. I'm barely surviving. I don't know how to do what I'm called to do.

I don't know how to be what I thought I should be. I don't know how to live the way I once felt that I could or would. I seem to be so utterly incapable of being a partaker of the strength that I once heard of.

God, you talked about being a deliverer. You talked about being a healer. You talked about being one who sets my life on a new course.

You said through the preachers that I heard, if anyone be in Christ, he's a new creation. The old things are passed away and behold, all things have become new. But I find the old things are very much still there.

And the new things are like a carrot on a stick, just always out of my reach. I seem to get closer, but then I draw back. I take two steps forward into victory and I take three back into defeat.

And now, especially as we're heading into a time when it's becoming unpopular to be a believer in Christ and we feel this encroaching darkness all around us, growing and increasing on a daily basis. And God, you called me to be the light of the world. How is that going to happen in my life? Where will I find the strength that I once heard of? Or I'm constantly hearing about it, but I don't seem to be able to find it.

The apostle Paul said it this way in Romans chapter seven, beginning at verse 14. I'll read it to you. For we know that the law is spiritual.

In other words, the things that God says we should be and should do are true. They're right. We should be honest.

We should be truthful. We should have virtuous minds. We should be able to raise our children in a godly environment.

We should be the best employee that our firm that we work for, whatever it is we do, we should be the best at doing it. But I'm carnal. I'm sold under sin.

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice, but what I hate, that I do. I want to live the way that God says I should, but I can't.

And I've tried, but I've failed. And I thought that I should be strong, but I find myself weak. And Paul goes on to say, if then I do that which I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.

But now it's no longer I who do it, but sin dwells in me. I know that in me, that is in my flesh, nothing good dwells. For to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

Paul said there's a spiritual law that came to life in me when I came to Christ. And that law makes me want to obey God. But I have another law at work inside of me.

A law that's like a magnet, always pulling me back to what I know is wrong, and I don't want to do this anymore. I don't want to live this way. I don't know how to be a Christian.

I don't know how to live a godly life. I don't know how to turn away from these besetting things that seem to have such a grip in my mind, my heart, and my life. And that is the testimony of many people.

I hear about strength, but where in the world is it? For the good that I will to do, I do not. But the evil that I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it's no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Paul said I find in a law that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. I love coming to church.

I love reading the word of God. I love the fact that this is truth. But I see another law warring in my members, inside of me, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? O wretched man that I am. Quite often that becomes the cry of somebody who really does want to walk with God. Really does want to stand out in this moral abyss that we're living in today as somebody who has virtue, as somebody who knows God, who's walking with God.

But that cry comes into the heart, O God, I've given it my best try, but I can't. I want to, but I don't know how. I love the word of God, but it seems that I can't obey the things that are written here that I should do and I should love.

Then Paul says, I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I know theologically that Christ delivers me, but how does that work? How does it work? I mean, I know that. I know he died on the cross for my sin.

You know that. I know that he rose from the grave and took captivity captive. You know that.

I know he promised his new life. You know that. But how does it work? That's the question.

And it's a legitimate question. It's not one God is offended at. This psalmist says, surely I'll go into the chamber of my house.

I will not go into the chamber of my house or up to the comfort of my bed. I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the mighty one of Jacob. It's the person that says, I feel deeply stirred again.

I feel hope again. I feel a desire again to be a living testimony of the reality of God. And I will, but I don't want to fail like I have before.

I don't want to be always learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth. I don't want to be reckoned among the powerless. I don't want to live a duplicitous life being one thing in church and being another thing Monday to Saturday in my work environment, my home and my community.

I'm sick of it. I'm tired of it. I don't want to live this way anymore.

That's who this message is for. It's for the person in 2016 who says, I feel stirred again in the chambers of my house. I feel stirred to pray like I haven't prayed in a long time.

I feel stirred to find that life, that dwelling place of God, that God's word promises will be mine through Jesus Christ. I've heard of it. In verse six, it says, behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah.

I've heard of it. Micah chapter five, verse two and four says, but you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to me the one to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from old, from everlasting. Verse four, speaking of the Messiah that would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah, and he will stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord, his God, and they shall abide.

For now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. Phenomenal promises. The psalmist says, I heard of it in Ephrathah.

I heard of what God proposed to do and how he was going to do it. He was going to be born in a specific place. He was going to stand.

He was going to feed those who come to him. He was going to feed them with strength, the strength of God in the majesty of his name. They will abide in him.

He will abide in them. They will abide in him and his name will be brought to greatness throughout the whole earth through a people that will be called his own. I know this.

I'm speaking for somebody. God has given me your question that's in your heart this morning as we go into this new year. The person that says, I know this.

You're not telling me anything new pastor. You're not telling me anything. I don't already know that Christ was going to come to Bethlehem.

He was going to be raised on the earth. He was going to walk among us for 33 years. He was going to die in my place on a cross.

He will go down into the grave and the third day he would be raised again from the dead. I would be promised new life in him. I know all of this.

Verse six in Psalm 132, he says, behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah. But the second part of the verse says we found it in the fields of the woods. It's one thing to hear about it.

It's another thing to find it. And I don't know about you, but I want to know the strength of God, not just to hear about it. I believe I speak for everybody here who's come to this church this morning that you want to know the strength of God.

You want to walk in the strength of God. So how do I find it? How does it work for me? How does it work in my life? I'm just so sick and tired of all the failure. Now let me take you on a little bit of a journey.

Let me go back into Luke chapter two, the Christmas story, what we we've really been speaking all throughout the Christmas season. In Luke chapter two, when this prophecy of Micah actually came to pass, when God came to this world in the form of a child. In Luke chapter two, it says, behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them and they were greatly afraid.

Then the angel said to them, do not be afraid for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which will be to all people. Don't be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy.

Remember the Psalmist said, the saints of God will shout for joy. It's good news. It should fill you and I with joy because it's to all people.

It's not for the select few that are strong in themselves. It's not just for the occasional prophet that raises up or mighty preacher of the gospel throughout various years in the past. This is a moment as the prophet Joel spoke about when God's spirit would be given to all flesh.

Everyone would be brought out of the battle of naturalness and into the supernatural life that God was now offering through his son, Jesus Christ. Don't be afraid. I'll bring you good news of great joy to all people.

For this is born to you this day in the city of David, a savior who is Christ the Lord. And this will be assigned to you. You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men. I was reading this again recently and I was thinking about it. And when you look at it in the natural, here's an angel standing before the shepherds.

He's reflecting the very glory of God to the point where they're afraid. It says the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were greatly afraid. He's standing and he's giving them this message that there's going to be an event that's going to change their lives forever and fill their hearts with joy.

And so on one hand, you have this angel making the announcement. On the other hand, you have the heavens literally opened. I don't know how many, but it says a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.

So you've got angels literally in the air shouting, giving glory to God, singing in a way that you and I, you can't, we can't even in our humanness hope to touch the kind of notes that they were hitting, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, goodwill towards men. So you have the angel

on one hand, you have the multitude of angels on the other. And in the midst, this angel says, and this will be a sign to you.

This will be your side. You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. And I find it interesting because you can't imitate that angel.

There's nothing of humanness that can imitate that angel. There's nothing of humanness could imitate the sky being filled with the host of heaven worshipping God. But the sign, the sign that the angel said would be a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths lying in a manger.

Now what was that sign all about? What was in that sign that caused heaven to burst open? What was in that sign that was good news and should bring great joy to you and to me? And here's what I believe it to be. Almighty God, Almighty God that created the universe by the word of his mouth. Almighty God who always was and always will be, was not created, will never die, will always exist.

Almighty God who was there before anything was created and will be hereafter into eternity. Almighty God who has the power to do anything he chooses to do, chose to come down and encapsulate himself in the weakness of humanity. And in the weakest of the weak of humanity, a baby.

A baby that can't dress itself. A baby that can't speak for itself. A baby that can't walk for itself.

A baby that can't feed itself. And not only a baby, but a baby that is wrapped in poor clothing. Swaddling cloths were literally rags, was wrapped in rags.

Good news is that God was willing to come down to where we are and to dwell inside of us and to make himself vulnerable. Not when we are strong, but when we are weak. He was willing to come and live inside of us, inside of our humanity.

He was willing that we in these human vessels should have within us and carry as we walk the very God of this universe. That all of our, and he was willing to indwell us even though we are wrapped in poverty. We are wrapped in weakness.

We are wrapped in failure. We are wrapped in nothingness, yet God was willing to indwell us and be God in us and be God to us and be God through us. Literally wrapping himself in our weaknesses, in our poverty, in our frailty, and showing us that though the Lord is high, Psalm 138, 6 says, yet he regards the lowly.

Isaiah 57, 15 says, thus saith the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy. I dwell in a high and holy place with him who has a contrite and humble spirit to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. I am willing to come to you in your weakness.

God's saying I'm not waiting for you to get it all together. I'm not waiting for you to get the victory in the areas that you struggle in, in your life. It's not the strong I've come to, it's the weak I've come to.

I've come to you and I pledge to be your strength. I pledge to feed you, I pledge to lift you up, I pledge to give you what you could never have in your own strength, I pledge to make you what you could never be, I pledge to give you a song that you could never sing, give you a mind you could never have. I pledge to give you a future that you could never hope to have apart from the strength of God being lived out inside of your life.

This shall be a sign to you. This is the sign. God could have come as a warrior, he could have come as a 25 foot creation, he could have come in a chariot, he could have come with millions of angels, but he came in the human form into a little baby who had to literally be carried around to prove to you and I that he was not offended by our weakness, not offended by our struggles, not offended by our poverty.

Glory to God. That's what should make you shout, that's what should give you joy. You see a baby can't make promises and if a baby could promise, he or she can't keep his promises.

God says you're not going to live by making promises to me, you're going to live by the promises I'm going to make to you. You're going to live by faith, the just shall live by faith, you're going to grow by faith, you're going to walk by faith, you're going to see victory by faith. It's going to be all of me and none of you.

You're going to believe and I'm going to perform everything I promised to you. I'm going to perform it for you and in you and your testimony and your song will not be about yourself, will not be about seven steps you took to become a better this or a better that. It'd be about Christ in you, the hope of glory.

All I did is behold him. I beheld his grace. I beheld his mercy.

I beheld his power. I beheld his death on my behalf. I beheld his resurrection.

I beheld his promises in the word of God and as I beheld him, I was changed from image to image by the spirit of God within me. I was changed into what God had promised I would be. I was given the victory that he won for me on the cross.

All I did is put one foot in front of the other and I believed him. I believe that 2016 is going to be a year when we find the power that we once heard about. We find the victory that so many have studied for so long, but it has somehow just eluded them, been outside.

You see, because the victory of God is not found in our strength. It's found in our weakness. It's found when we've come to the end.

It's found when we know we need him. Glory be to God. No wonder the heavens burst open.

No wonder angels began to sing. No wonder because they understood this mystery. The shepherds didn't fully understand it.

The religious crowd didn't have any idea what was going on in their midst, but the angels knew that God had come down and he had come down as the deepest demonstration he could make to us, that I come to you in your weakness, not in your strength. I come to you in your need, not in your abundance. I come to you when you know that there's nothing you can do without me.

And it's then, as the scripture says, I stand and I begin to feed you. It's then that the abundance that was promised in Bethlehem through the prophet Micah becomes yours. It's then that the majesty of the Lord's name begins to rise upon you and you begin to abide in him.

I'm the vine, you are the branches. If a man abides in me, the same will bear much fruit. It's then that the name of the Lord is brought to greatness, not through a people who are great in themselves, but a people who know that without God, they will never be delivered from this body of death.

Only through Jesus Christ will I ever be delivered. Only through Christ will I ever know the full victory. And Luke 2.20 says, the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen as it was told to them.

They returned, oh God, would you help us to go home glorifying you and praising you today? Would you help us, oh Jesus Christ, to put away our moaning and groaning, our looking in the mirror, looking at our own resumes, trying to find some strength in ourselves? Would you help us to understand that all of our righteousness is our filthy rags in the sight of a holy God? Would you help us to understand that you come to those whose hearts are broken, who want to live for you, but as Paul once did, have come to that understanding that without God doing it, it is not going to get done. Would you help us again to invite you, Lord Jesus Christ, into our hearts, into that place that you have longed to occupy. In Psalm 132 again, verse 70 says, let us go to his tabernacle, let us worship at his footstool.

Arise, Lord, to your resting place, you and the ark of your strength. Let your priests be clothed with righteousness and let your saints shout for joy. Let's get up and let's go.

This year, let's get up and let's go. Let's not give rest to our eyes, as the scripture says. Let's not give slumber to our eyelids until that dwelling place that God longs to dwell in is open to him to do what he chooses to do with it.

And that dwelling place is my heart and my life and your heart and your life. That's where God has chosen to dwell. That's what he longs to be.

So let us go into his tabernacle. Let us worship at his footstool. Arise, O Lord, to your resting place, you and the ark of your strength.

Let your priests be clothed with righteousness and let your saints shout for joy. In other words, let those who preach the gospel return to this truth. Let the preaching of the cross one more time become our strength.

Let the understanding of who God is, what he did on that cross, and what he desires to do in the hearts of his people, let that be what the priests who stand in the pulpits of this nation begin to preach once again. And let your saints shout for joy as people begin to lay hold of this truth. Christ in me is the hope of glory.

Christ in me is my life. Christ in me is my song. Christ in me is my ministry.

Christ in me is my journey. Christ in me is my vision. Christ in me is my power.

Christ in me is my hope. It's Christ in me. Christ in me.

Christ in me. That's why Paul could say later in life, when I'm weak, then I'm strong. Because he understood it.

He knew it. He had been a Pharisee. He had fulfilled the law.

He had striven in the flesh, but he knew it was all for nothing. Because there was a lot at war inside of him against the law of God. He knew somebody stronger had to come into this physical temple and overpower the works of hell and give him that life that could only be given by God.

So if you're weak today, don't despise it. You're in a good place. You're in a better place than those who think they are strong in themselves.

Glory to the name of Jesus. Glory to the name. You and I should not be satisfied until we are shouting for joy at what God is doing in our lives.

Until we can say, I found the power of God. I didn't find it in my strength. I didn't find it in my certificates on the wall.

I found it in my brokenness. I found it in my weakness. I found it in my nothingness.

I found the power of God. I found it. I found the reason that angels were rejoicing in the heavens.

I found the sign that God said would be the sign that would give me hope and fill my mouth with joy and my heart with singing. Hallelujah to the lamb of God. I found it.

Here's what the Lord says, for the Lord has chosen Zion. He's desired it for his dwelling place. This is my resting place forever.

Here I will dwell for I've desired it. I will, verse 15 of Psalm 132, I will abundantly bless her provision. I will satisfy her poor with bread.

I will clothe her priests with salvation and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There I will make the horn of David to grow. In other words, the promises I gave to David will grow then.

I will prepare a lamp for my anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon himself his crown shall flourish. When God comes into the heart that's broken, when we are finally open to that which God desires to do, then it's no longer me promising God saying, I will be a better husband.

I will stop drinking. I will stop yelling at my kids. I will stop doing this, which all of these things that we say we will do bring us into hopelessness.

But when Christ is at the center of a broken life, now the I wills of God begin to take over. You look at it again beginning at verse 14. Here I will dwell.

I will abundantly bless her provision. I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will clothe her priests with salvation.

Her saints shall shout aloud for joy. I will make the horn of David grow. I will prepare a lamp for my anointed.

His enemies I will clothe with shame, but upon himself his crown shall flourish. I will be God to you. I will be God in you.

I will be God through you. I will be everything that you've ever longed for me to be, not in your strength, but in your weakness. That's why the psalmist begins by saying, surely I will go into the chamber of my house.

I will not go into the chamber of my house or up to the comfort of my bed. I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the mighty one of Jacob. I will not be denied.

I will not live short of my inheritance. I will not settle for a joyless Christianity. I will not settle for continual defeat when Christ has promised me victory.

I will not allow woundings of the past to continue to drag my face down in the dust. I will not allow prison doors to hold me any longer. I will not settle for blindness when he's promised to give me a lamp.

I will not. I'm going to pray. I'm going to pray like I've never prayed before.

My prayers will have no promises to God for I can't fulfill them. My prayers will lay hold of the promises of God for me. And I will open my heart in my weakness and say, Jesus, be God in me.

Astound me, Lord. Astound those that know me. Astound those that believe that I'll never change.

I know some of you here have had family gatherings at Christmas and you've had family members tell you that. You might go to church, but you'll never change. Well, your family members don't get the last word.

I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids until I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the mighty one of Jacob. I'm going to find the strength this year that I once heard about. I'm going to find the strength and truth that I once believed in my innocence and my youth.

But now, as I've gotten older, I'm going to find you, Lord, a new and a fresh. And that will be my altar call today. For every person in this house is just willing to say, Lord God, yesterday's gone.

Yesterday's successes and yesterday's failures are all gone. But I'm not going to draw back. I'm going to press in now until what I've heard today becomes a reality in my life.

I'm going to walk in the victory that is mine. And I'm inviting you, Lord, as you indwelt that human body, that human body that was named Jesus, as you indwelt God, your own son, in his weakness. And you wrapped him with poverty, literally.

I recognize today that you are willing to wrap yourself in me, in my weakness and in my poverty. And as Jesus had to be carried for those first few years of his life, you will carry me. And you will take me where I can't go in my own strength.

You'll help me where I need the help. And you'll be God to me in all that you're asking me to be, to glorify you. And so, Lord, I'm not going to draw back.

I'm not going to live at the edge of the shores of promised life in Christ. I'm going in. I don't care how big the giants are.

I don't care who said I can't do it. I'm going in. I'm going in in the strength of my God.

And I'm going to become everything that God has promised that I will be. If that's the cry of your heart for 2016, this year, this year. Remember, this year is the year of answered prayer.

If that's the cry of your heart, say, Lord, and this is so important this morning. I don't know if you'll hear something any more important at the beginning of the year this year. I'm not going to live on the outer edges of the life that God has promised me in Christ.

I'm laying down my own efforts to try to be what I can never be in my own strength. And I'm going to trust that Christ in me is going to help me and guide me where I need to go. I'm going to believe the truth that I

once knew.

And I'm going to find the power of it. If that's the cry of your heart, we're going to stand in a moment. And I ask you, please come just join me at the front of this auditorium in the annex, you could step between the screens, North Jersey as well.

And this is touching your heart at home. Just stand up right where you are. Make your way down, we're going to pray together.

We're going to believe God for the power of heaven to become yours. Let's stand together, please. We'll worship for about 10 minutes or so.

And we'll come back together to pray. It's such a wonderful truth that we don't have to bring about the change on our own that God asked for, that somehow it's hard for people to believe it. But when your heart is finally open to the fact that God made the choice to indwell us in our poverty and in our weakness and in our struggles.

He made the choice, it was His choice to come to us in our weakness. And when you realize that, then suddenly the prodigal son parable all makes sense. He wanted to cover, he wanted to empower, he wanted to change.

He wanted to invite us to tell others. Thank God for that, thank God.

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