

Experiencing Jesus

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala emphasizes the importance of experiencing Jesus as our shield, strength, and stronghold through prayer and reliance on God in our daily lives.

Duration: 31:41

Scripture: Psalm 3:3, Psalm 18:2, Psalm 18:35, Psalm 28:7, Psalm 62:7, Psalm 144:2, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Jesus"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a personal experience of receiving a text message from his son with a Bible verse that he had been contemplating preaching on. He emphasizes the importance of speaking what God wants him to speak and choosing the timely passage for the congregation. The preacher discusses the need for rest and finding refuge in God's presence amidst the pressures of life. He encourages the congregation to take Jesus as their shield and trust in Him to fight their battles.

Transcript

I think God has something special in store for us today, merging theology with practice. One of the things I am always so concerned about is that when I open my mouth and speak from someplace in this Bible, that I'm speaking what God would have me to speak, and that the passage is the one that's timely, and that you all need to hear. The Bible is full of truth, and after you preach for a while, anybody, take any minister, put him in the corner and give him a passage, he'll come up with some points from it.

To speak what God wants you to speak the way he wants you to speak it, and with that timing, is so important to me. I went to bed last night just meditating and struggling with, Lord, this is the verse I feel, but then there's these other passages, and since I haven't used notes for a couple years now, I'm searching, Lord, please give me the verse that the people need to hear. So I went to bed thinking something, God, confirm this, that this is the passage you want me to speak from.

I'm jet lagged because of the 12-hour time difference from the Philippines. Sometime early in the morning, I'm next to my phone, and I'm just laying there, and I hear a little beep on my phone. My son sends me a text message with the verse that I had gone to bed saying, oh God, is this the verse I should preach on? Now what are the odds on that, right? There's a lot of verses in this book, am I right? So he must wanna say something to all of us today, amen? And the verse is simple.

It's found in the Psalms. I'll tell you where it is in a moment. And it's written, the experts believe, at a time in David's life when he had gone through every kind of trial and tribulation, and he had gone from shepherd boy, anointed by the prophet Samuel, prophesied that he would be the next king of Israel, to battles against Goliath, battles against the Philistines, a leader in the army under King Saul.

Then Saul turns on him, and now he's on the run, and now it looks like he won't be king. Before it looked good, he was in the military. He was the darling of all the people.

But now he's being chased by the very man that he had worked for, who he had respected. So now he's run through all the desert and in hiding in caves and rocks and crags and whatnot. And now when it's all over, and God has settled him on the throne, in Psalm 18, he kind of stops and he looks back and he says, oh my goodness.

It's a long Psalm. We're only gonna look at not only just two verses, we're just looking at one phrase. And he looks back like we look back on our lives.

You ever look back on your life? You ever get to sit down in a chair or just alone somewhere, and you look back on your life and you say, God has been awesome to me. Come on, is that a testimony of anybody here? Can we put our hands together? God has been awesome. We're not the king of Israel.

We're not David. We're not the Psalmists. We're not any of that, but we are who we are and God loves us.

So this is the context. Remember, every time you read a verse in the Bible, you're always asking yourself, what's the context? That's the setting, and then David says this. Let's look at it, Psalm 18.

I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, is my rock in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation and my stronghold.

So that's the second part of the verse here. Verse two ends with this. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation and my stronghold.

Say that, read that with me out loud. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation and my stronghold. Now, those are military antiquated terms that we would not use today.

When we talk about people, we don't usually use the word shield. Shield has to do not just with battle, with battle years ago, centuries ago, because today, we don't wear shields, although there are still shields used in military service. The horn of my salvation is totally off out in left field.

Horn is, in the Bible, is always a symbol of strength and it comes from the horns of an ox. So when an ox charged you with his horns, that became a symbol and a word that was used to signify strength. Strength, horn is strength.

Whenever you see the Bible use right hand, it speaks of power. Right hand spoke of power. Horns speak of strength.

He's the strength of my salvation and my stronghold. This is a word we do not use anywhere. Like, yo, where you going tomorrow? I'm gonna go visit my stronghold.

These are things people do not say to one another anymore. Just nobody says that. It had meaning to David because David was on the run and he went to a stronghold.

By the way, that's translated in some other translations as high tower, my high tower, my stronghold. So what is David saying here? David is looking back on his life and he's saying, oh, do I love you, Lord? You have been so good to me. And then he uses three symbols and he identifies them as that God is those things to him.

He says, God, you have been my shield. It's not that I don't, I have a shield. Yeah, I have a shield and the men who fight with me have shields, but you are my shield.

And you are the horn of my salvation. You are the strength of my salvation. And Lord, you are also my strong tower, my hiding place.

Now, what was David saying there? David was saying, God is my, has been, has proven to be and will continue to be my defense because in life, we fight battles. Much of the Bible has to do with a military context and even in the New Testament where we don't fight enemies, physical enemies, and that's not part of the Christian life is to be fighting and fussing with people. But there are battles that the New Testament talks about that we're all facing and some of us are going through it right now.

Spiritual battles with invisible enemies, battles with temptation, battles with evil spirits, battle with circumstances that are negative, battling with despair because the bottom has fallen out. This military context is very applicable to us because just in another sense, we all fight those battles. We all go through challenges.

The musicians, they're playing, the choir that's singing, you don't think these people are fight battles? Well, of course they do. If you live, you're in a fight. And if you're a Christian, you're in a fight.

So let's just take it with David first and then let's transfer it to Jesus. In any warfare, you need a shield because stuff is being thrown at you and you need something to defend you. A shield parries the blow that's fired at you.

Someone throws, puts a dagger or hurls rocks back in those days and what you do is you move your shield. There were two types of shield. The big shield that covered the whole body as time went on in the time of Jesus and then there was the smaller shield that the Roman soldiers kept.

Back in David's day, they were using shields. And he says, the Lord is my shield. I need protection and the Lord is the only one who can protect me.

The Lord is the only one who can protect me. Yeah, I use a shield, I fight in the battles, but I know this, in life, the only one who can protect me is the Lord and the reason I'm alive today and I'm where I am, David says, is that God has been my shield. God has protected me from the stuff that's been hurled at me.

Well, let's apply that to our own lives now. Jesus is our shield. Let me just put this together right now quickly for us in the day that we live.

We can say, because he's our savior, that Jesus is not just our Lord and our savior and our comforter, but he is our shield. Shield from what? Shield from all the stuff that the enemy throws at us. All the demonic forces that we are engaged with when they attack you, if you try to defend yourself, you're gonna be beaten.

The Lord is the only one who can be your shield. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and when the devil starts hurling his fiery darts at us, you need a shield and the Bible now gives us the ultimate truth. The Lord Jesus is my shield.

He's the one every day who has to protect me. Not just from satanic assaults, but from ourselves. One of the greatest needs today is a shield from our own silliness and our own selfishness and our own lack of wisdom and our own desires that get out of control, that are sinful and self-centered.

Who's gonna protect me from me? Forget the devil, some of us don't even need the devil to come around. We'll do it ourselves. Come on, do I get an amen? It's ridiculous.

The Bible says in James, a man is drawn away, a man sins when he's drawn away by his own lust. There's no mention of the devil there. We know he's behind the temptation scene, but it says when a man sins, when he's drawn away by his own desires.

You and I don't know that we have desires that are not of God. You don't never get tempted to get angry? You never get tempted to say something you shouldn't say? Come on, who's the only one who can shield you from that? The Lord Jesus Christ. He's the shield against every arrow, against every enemy assault.

The Lord Jesus is our shield. That is an amazing thing to start every day. Now let's merge it with the practical.

One of the problems I see as I travel around the country and around the world and just counseling people and then my own life that I can study is that we are getting positional truth and truths about God which don't come true in our lives. We think, we've been somehow brainwashed into thinking that because you read a verse in the Bible, it's gonna come true for you. That you say something and then that's gonna happen.

And this is the practical nature of this that I wanna make real to you. The Lord is my shield and we can go amen and do a bump and everything else and be celebrating. The Lord is my shield.

But if you and I don't ask him every day to be your shield, you know what happens? You're gonna get pounded on a daily basis. Faith is the only thing that appropriates what God says about himself. And the only faith that's worth anything is the faith that prays.

Listen again. Faith is the only thing that appropriates what God says about himself. And the only faith that is real meaningful faith is the faith that takes the promise and prays it.

Let me give you an example. John the Baptist saw Jesus and he said, look, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, he's the savior. Is that correct? Does he save everyone? No.

Who does he save? Those who call on him and say, save me. When we humble ourselves and we believe it enough to say, Jesus, forgive me and save me, then he becomes your savior. Otherwise, it's a concept.

The shield is a concept until you and I pray it and believe it and grasp it and say, Jesus, I'm not leaving my apartment today unless I know you will be my shield. I can't go out there, be my shield today. And that prayer won't last through the next day.

You might have to pray it 20 times that day. And next day for sure, you have to pray it. Why? We can say Jehovah Jireh, God is our provider, right? And yet Jesus said, pray this way.

Give us this day our. Well, why do you have to pray it? Isn't he gonna give it? No, you gotta ask. You have not because you.

He's your shield, he's your provider, he's all of that. But a lot of people are walking around in a total fantasy. Think of what the polls are showing now about the way Christians live who go to church on Sunday.

Forget the world. Forget the people who don't believe in Christ. It's very sad, very sad the way people live.

They live in about 14, 15 categories. They live exactly like people who don't go to church. And they're tripped up and we get defeated and they live in fear and they're full of complexes and doing this and doing all of that.

And then they're shouting glory about God is on the throne. All right, I know God is on the throne, but how about God working in my life? How about God working in my life? I don't wanna sing he's got the victory. I wanna experience the victory.

Come on, can we put our hands together? We can talk and you can say amen. Oh, that's good, Psalm 18, he's preaching the word. God is my shield, he was David's shield.

But how about your shield, is he your shield? Is he saving you from yourself? Is he protecting you from the fiery darts of the enemy? You and I will never know that until we believe it enough to pray it, to pray the promise. God, you said you would be my shield, now be my shield. But if we just live in some comatose state, prayerless, and we just use slogans, never ask, why would Jesus say ask and you shall receive? Seek and you'll find, knock and it shall be opened.

How our lives would change, brothers and sisters, if every day started with us just saying, God, I'm not going out unless I know you're my shield today. I'm asking you and I'm believing. Be my shield, protect me.

I need the protection. How many need him to be your shield? Come on, lift your hand. Do we not need him to be our shield? Think of all the Christians who make shipwreck of their lives.

Think of all the messes that we know are going on. And then we just are quoting verses. God is good all the time.

You know, I'm into that myself, but I mean, enough is enough. People's lives are just riddled with weakness. They're blowing up their own lives, but when they see someone, they feel that meaning, that spiritual somehow to say, God is good.

Yo, all the time. That didn't mean anything unless we're living it. How many want to live it? Come on, say amen with me.

I want to live it. I want to know he's my shield. My late friend Dave Wilkerson one time said to me, Jim, what percentage of pastors in New York City do you think are defeated secretly in their spirits? I said, what are you talking about? He said, no, I've been here traveling around.

I pastored before. He's traveled extensively, author of Crossing the Switchblade, founder of the Teen Challenge Ministry. He said, no, behind all of the pontificating and Bible pounding and all the God is good all the time, come on, everybody shout glory.

Underneath it all, what percentage do you think are totally defeated when they get alone? They're just defeated and depressed. I said, wow, I don't know. I know what you're talking about because New York City's a tough place.

There's a lot of pastors in churches, storefronts, regular buildings and all of that that just are under the gun. They're so discouraged. Well, look, 1,500 ministers are leaving the ministry every month now in America.

That's one a day. 1,500 a month. But they preach from the Bible and they say, God is on the throne, God is this.

But see, you can talk it and not experience it. You can say he's a shield, but the point is, is he my shield? He's the horn of my salvation. Shield speaks of defending ourselves and we need it spiritually all the time from evil thoughts, from just every kind of strategy of Satan.

But now David says something else. He says he's the horn of my salvation. He gives me the strength to go over the wall, climb the mountain, get through the valley.

When I'm fatigued and I can't go on, you are the horn of my salvation. Yes, I eat food, proteins, all of that. I take care of my body, but ultimately spiritual strength is different than physical strength.

You can be in good shape and be working out and inside be hanging by a thread. Your emotions and nerves can be worn down. Your spiritual tank is empty.

And David says, you know what I found looking back on my life? When I confronted the enemy and needed strength to get the victory and climb over the wall and attack the city and fight the battle and win it, you are the horn of my salvation. You give strength to your people. God, you have given strength to me.

How many can testify that in your own life? Listen, look at me first. When you didn't think you could even go on, I'll lift up both my hands and my legs and my waist and my chest, everything. How many have found that God gives you strength to just keep going? I'm telling you, he keeps your strength.

He gives you strength to keep going. But again, but again, God is the strength of my life and we can quote all those verses. Quoting the verses doesn't change anything.

This is the fantasy of the 60s and onward positive confession, fake faith movement. That by speaking the word only, that's more Christian science than it is Christianity. You don't create reality by speaking things.

You create reality by coming before the Lord and saying, God, be my strength, be the strength of my life today. I receive your strength today. And if you gotta go back 20 times, go back 20 times.

If just speaking it is enough, then why in the world was Jesus up every morning early before the sun came up? Why was he praying up on a mountain? Why did the disciples say to him, Lord, teach us to pray? He was the son of God. He could have just said, I am the son of God. I don't have to pray, I don't have to read the word.

I am the son of God. I am a friend of God. You can say anything you want.

Christianity is not about slogans, it's about power. Power that God gives to his people so that we can fight the battle. That wall that you're facing today, you're not gonna go under, you're gonna go over that wall.

God is gonna help you. Can we put our hands together and say amen? I meet people everywhere that are just into slogan Christianity. The reality of it, the working out of it, they're flopping left and right, but then they think to cover up is just to shout yeah, well glory.

I'm all for well glory and I'm all for speaking the word of God. Don't misunderstand me, but I wanna live in the reality of that. I want God to give me strength every day.

He's the horn of my salvation. He's the one who gives me strength. And he is my high tower.

He's my hiding place. The Bible tells us that all the great men and women of God, they needed a stronghold, a high tower at times. You know what that means? That means in battle, listen choir, sometimes you need, look, to do this, the punch comes and you defend.

And then when you're facing a challenge and you need the victory, God gives you the strength to overcome the enemy, to go over the wall, to accomplish what God's called you to do. I will be what he wants me to be. I will do what he calls me to do.

But there's other moments in life when you just need to absolutely get away and hide. There were times that David was under such strain and Saul was so close and David's nervous and emotional systems were so drawn like a rubber band that all he could do was go way up high to a place where nobody could get to him. And he found in that stronghold, in that high tower, he found rest and peace from the enemy.

Because if all you're doing is fighting and defending, you're gonna break down. There has to be a place of rest. Haven't you ever had those moments, brothers and sisters, where it just becomes, as they say in Spanish, demasiado, too much.

Just can't take it. Every one of these men here, we've had those moments. Choir members behind me, have you had those moments in life where it all just gets to be too much? And David says, just like I found an actual, literal high rock and strong tower up high, a stronghold, he says, God, you are my stronghold.

The presence of Jesus can become a hiding place for you so that no matter what people are saying about you, no matter how hard the pressure is, you can escape and just be in the presence of Jesus and get above it all. Oh, I love that about Jesus. The presence of Jesus is not just the person of Jesus, it's almost like a place.

And when you get into his presence and you run to him, he lifts you so high above the strife of tongues and all the stuff that's going on on planet Earth. I heard the story recently about an eagle that had been wounded and was coming down because he had been shot by a hunter. And as he was descending, the eagle looked up to the sky like in a forlorn, sad way, because eagles aren't made to be low.

Eagle's defense is to get above everything. They can soar higher than any bird. Nobody can shoot at them where they go.

But the eagle made the mistake of getting down too low and someone nailed it. God calls us to be eagles, to live high, to get high above everything else. Come on, haven't you ever had that experience in life? I've walked in this building sometimes, this building and our previous building, where I didn't even know, like, God, if you don't come and lift me up and hide me in a place where you can minister to me, I can't even go on.

Anyone ever have something like that happen? Lift your hand up if you know what I'm talking about. Yeah, there's a time for everything. You defend and you fight and you climb over the wall and you do the thing God called you to do, but sometimes it's just, oh God, you are my high tower, my stronghold.

That's what Jesus is. But you and I will never know it unless we come to him and say, Jesus, I'm not gonna be a slogan Christian. I'm gonna live the Christian life by your grace.

You will be my shield. You're gonna protect me. Today, don't talk about tomorrow.

You don't know if you'll be alive tomorrow. All we have is today. All in favor say aye.

All we have is today. Today, you will be my shield. Today, I ask you and I receive your strength for today.

Whatever I face today, God, that's how life has to be lived on a daily basis. And sometimes when you're under intense pressure, listen to a practical word from the pastor here for you. Sometimes you gotta do it on an hourly basis.

I've had times of stress in my life. I had to go hour by hour. God, if you'll just hold me from three to four.

At four, we'll talk again. But right now, three to four is what I need, one hour. And God will do it.

God will keep us. God will be our shield. God will be our strength.

And God will hide us when he needs to hide us. Oh, just to get alone in his presence. Let's close our eyes.

Anybody here being attacked left and right in ways that no one knows but you. And you wanna take Jesus as your shield. Get out of your seat.

Upstairs, downstairs, just get out of your seat, especially if you're visiting here and the Lord brought you. And then God would give me this word because he knew that you needed to hear that he will be your shield. You don't have to fight for yourself.

He'll fight for you. He'll defend you. Pastor, I'm running out of juice.

The wall that I have to get over, the mountains are so high, the valley seems so long. I need strength. I need Jesus as my strength today.

I need Jesus as my strength. Get out of your seat and come and stand here. Not a slogan, not just saying a verse, but actually receiving it.

Pastor, I need a hiding place quick. I need a high tower. I need a stronghold.

I need him to put his arms around me like a mother hen and just hold me because my nervous system, my emotions, they are absolutely, I'm at the end of myself sometimes. Even this very week, I just need his arms around me because of what I'm going through. God understands that.

Lord, we ask you to be our shield today. If tomorrow comes, we'll talk to you tomorrow, Lord, about being our shield tomorrow. But right now, all we have is today.

Protect us from ourselves. Protect us from the fiery darts of the evil one. Unclean, evil thoughts, angry thoughts.

Shield us. We don't know how you do it, just do it. For you said you would be a shield for your people.

We ask you to be our strength today. To those who are running out and feel they can't go on, they will go on. They will walk, they will run.

They will stand because you are the horn of our salvation. Be our strength today. Be our hiding place today, Lord.

For those of us with strained nerves and emotions, weighed down by stress, heartache, heartbreak, disappointment, wrap your arms around your servants. Wrap your arms around that woman, Lord, who needs that touch from you right now, Lord. Wrap your arms around her.

You know every secret tear she's cried. Wrap your arms around her right now and be her high tower, her stronghold. Lord, save us from mental Christianity that just has concepts and says words and never really appropriates all that you promise to be to your people.

Help us not to just sing the victory, but to have the victory. Help us not to just quote verses, but experience the truth of them in our lives. We thank you for the body of Christ.

We thank you that you're gonna help all of us today.

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