

God Strengthens Us by the Gospel

by John Piper

God's strength is not based on keeping His people weak, but on making them strong through the Gospel.

Duration: 44:29

Scripture: Psalm 46:1, Proverbs 31:25, Isaiah 40:29, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Ephesians 6:10, Philippians 4:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, Hebrews 4:16, 1 Peter 3:6

Topics: "Gospel Strength", "Christian Endurance"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the need for true strength that comes from God, not from worldly sources like sexiness, assertiveness, or power. It highlights the power of the Gospel to strengthen individuals, focusing on faith, fearlessness, and endurance in the face of challenges. The speaker urges both men and women to seek strength through the Gospel, which provides unwavering support and sustenance in all circumstances.

Transcript

Father, I pray for teenage girls and women, I pray for little girls, I dream about growing up, I pray for boys and men, that because of this service, they will all become very strong. With the kind of strength that shows up when we need it most, which isn't when the world thinks we need it. So I don't pray for their strength, I pray for your strength.

Dying strength, suffering strength, sacrificing strength, loving strength. The strength that keeps on going when there is no more fuel. Just the steadfast love of the Lord and mercies new in the nick of time, every morning, through the Gospel, by your grace.

So God, make us a strong church now, I pray, in Jesus' name, Amen. Today we begin the final paragraph of the book of Romans. The greatest letter that was ever written.

No comparisons. And at least some of you would perhaps be asking when are we going to finish? And I'll spare you the suspense and give you the plan so that you can be praying with me. We began April 26, 1998.

And we'll end on Christmas Eve, Lord willing. I thought it's a good day to end the book of Romans. So we'll be spending five messages on these three verses.

My picture is that we've been flying. It's a seven and a half year flight. And the landing pattern is not like a Piper Cub.

You ever flown in one of those little planes? They go like this. They land like that. It's more like a 747 and they just belly in.

They take five weeks to land. Because in these three verses, there are themes that Paul packs in to draw everything together in a most remarkable way. So that's the plan.

And I ask you to join me in prayer that God would make this Advent season that Advent begins next Sunday, that He would make this Advent season the richest, most powerful, soul-saving, strength-giving season that we've ever known as a church. Don't just settle in and say, oh, it's going to be another good Advent season. But say, make it historic.

Make it historic. May hundreds come to Christ. Pray like that.

May amazing things happen in relationships that seem hopeless. Pray big, God-believing, God-sized prayers for Advent. This is a doxology.

Verses 25, 26, and 27 is a doxology. The word doxology comes from two Greek words, doxa and logos. Doxa means glory.

Logos is word. A word ascribing glory to God is what a doxology is. There are several in Paul.

He's not the only one who loves them, but he does love them. They assume something. A doxology assumes that everything happens and everything exists in order to display and draw attention to the glory of God.

So they show up at points in history and points in writing and points in preaching that are climactic in order to show what's going on. What's it all about? So we've got one at the end of chapter 11. You remember.

From Him, through Him, and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. That's a doxology that brought the first 11 chapters to a climax before Paul launched into the more practical application of these great doctrines in chapters 1-11.

And now he's done. And how will he end this greatest of all letters? He begins with the words, Now to Him... Now before we read on, when Paul says Him, God the Father, his mind is already on verse 27 where he finishes it, Now to Him, drop down to verse 27, to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ, Amen. That's the short form of the doxology.

But when Paul, dictating probably to Tertius, realizes he's coming to the end of this long book, I don't know, maybe it took him days, weeks, hours, I don't know how he did his dictation, but he saw himself coming to the end of this longest and greatest of all things that he'd ever written or would write, he could not bring himself to give a short form. So when he said, Now to Him, he just packed it in. He just began to pack it in with phrase after phrase after phrase, which we're going to take five weeks to unpack.

Now unto Him, and then the unpacking of the Him and the Gospel and what he's been talking about, and then he comes in with, to the only wise God be glory forevermore, Amen. There are other lovers of doxologies in the New Testament. Peter has a great one.

It goes like this, To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen. 1 Peter 4.11 John has a great one. He packs it in too, not quite as long.

Paul's is the longest in the New Testament. Revelation 1.5 To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, priest to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen. And of course, Jude has the most famous doxology of all, probably.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, authority before all times, now and forever, Amen. It is a great doxology at the end of Jude. So, all the apostles loved doxologies and there's a very simple reason, they loved the glory of God.

They knew that the earth exists, the universe exists, galaxies exist, history exists, we exist to draw all attention to how glorious God is. That's why we exist. That's why everything is.

It's all about making much of how great and beautiful and strong and wise and just and eternal and strong. All that's glory. God is.

So here we are dealing with the biggest doxology in the Bible. I think there may be a bigger one in the Old Testament. This is the biggest one in the New Testament in these last five weeks of our study.

And Paul is thinking, these are the last words the Romans are going to hear from me until I get there, if I get there. And it may be that these are the last words you will ever hear from the Bible because you may die before you hear another word. So I hope that you'll listen very carefully to a final word from the Apostle.

I want to focus on one phrase. Now unto Him who is able to strengthen you according to My Gospel. That's all I want to talk about.

Now unto Him who is able to strengthen you according to My Gospel. Everything else in verses 25 and 26 unpacks the Gospel. It's called the preaching of Jesus Christ.

Just follow me. If you've got your Bible open, just follow me. It's called the preaching of Jesus Christ.

So He's central to the Gospel. It is according to revelation of a mystery that was kept secret for long ages. Now that mystery we'll talk about later, but it is this.

The Gentiles, the nations, all those cat, fish, eating, uncircumcised, unclean, non-proper worshipping Gentiles are totally full members of the family through faith in Jesus along with Jews. That's the mystery. It's been kept hidden.

Now it's being disclosed. It's being disclosed. And ironically, strangely, paradoxically, it's being disclosed by means of the very prophetic writings that kept it secret.

This is all weeks to come. And it was all by the command of the eternal God. One command and everything was unleashed.

And it is all leading to your obedience of faith. All of that needs unpacking. But here's the amazing thing.

It just couldn't go there yet. Because if all of that is unpacking the Gospel, there's really one main thing about God that this closing doxology mentions. Just one thing.

One main thing. And this is what blew me away. Picture all the things that the Apostle Paul could focus on about God's attributes, about God's deeds, in highlighting His glory as he closes this book.

What would you choose? Now unto Him who created the universe. Now unto Him who sustains it by the Word of His power. Now unto Him who chooses a people for Himself.

Now unto Him who rules the nations. Now unto Him who sent His Son to die. Now unto Him who raised Him from the dead.

Now unto Him who will come again to judge the quick and the dead. Now unto Him who's gathering a people for Himself. He chose none of those.

He chose to say, as He signed off, now unto Him who is able to strengthen you. That's worth a sermon. That's amazing.

I don't want to go over it too quick. I just want you to feel the wonder of it. It's wonderful at several levels.

I want you to feel them. I want you to enjoy this. I want you to live here.

I want you to get strong here. There's something that's obvious that's wonderful. And there's something less obvious that's even more wonderful.

I'll point out the obvious and then I'll draw out the less obvious. The obvious thing is that when Paul chooses now to bring glory to his God with a doxology at the end of a long, glorious book, he chooses to highlight something about God that will show his glory. And he chooses, he's able to make you strong.

Now unto Him who is able to strengthen you, be glory forevermore. He says He's wise. He says He's kept things hidden for a while.

He says He's revealing them. He says it's for the nations. He says it's by eternal command.

But all of that is serving to unpack the Gospel according to which He makes us strong. He has one main thing to say. God who strengthens you is glorious.

Now, that's obvious. Here's the less obvious. But crystal clear, I think, once you see it.

Many kings and dictators in history and today want very much to be glorious. They want to be strong and rich and smart. And they want to be known that way.

Little African potentates or Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan talk to our missionaries who've come home about the abuses of power in this renegade dictatorship that America gives half a billion dollars to. Dictators and kings throughout all history build their strength on the back of a weak people, keeping their citizens weak and poor and uneducated. Why? An educated people is a threat to a dictator.

A prosperous middle class is a threat to a dictator. A strong people is a threat to a toy king. So the way you preserve your glory is by keeping your people weak.

That's the way you do it unless you're God. And then you do the opposite. Now unto Him who keeps His people weak be glory, because He's stronger than they are and will keep them down like all the other kings, like all the other dictators.

God will step on the back of a broken people to exalt His great power. It doesn't say that. It says the opposite.

God's going to get glory. Oh yes. That's why we exist.

But He doesn't go about it like all the kings of the earth. And this is glorious. Now unto Him who is able to strengthen you.

I've spent most of my adult life trying to explain that the God-centeredness of God is goodness unless you want to be God. So few people get it, it seems. Here it is again.

Let me try again. God means to be glorious. Oh yes.

And the Apostle Paul means to get Him glory as the last word in this book. That's where it's all been going. That's why you exist and I exist.

He gets the glory. What do we get? Strength! He doesn't step on it. He doesn't break our back to get His glory.

God magnifies His magnificence by raising us up and making us strong. I love that message. I love to give God glory.

My life is in that glory. The more wonderful His glory, the more wonderful the resources of my strength. The more manifold are His beauties and attributes, the more manifold are the streams of strength that flow into my life.

Why wouldn't you want a God like that? Why wouldn't you want God to be first when you have a God who doesn't exalt His power on the back of His broken people like every other dictator that has ever been? Now unto Him who is able to strengthen you, be glory forever and ever. God doesn't secure His strength by keeping His people weak. He magnifies His glory by making His people strong.

And that's not bad news. That's good news. God's intent to be glorified is good news.

God's God-centeredness, God's passion for God's glory is such good news because this is the kind of God we have who loves to get His glory by making His people strong. A fountain is shown to be a full fountain because it overflows. Not because it demands labor from people to haul buckets up the hill to pour their work into its spring.

Question. What kind of strength are we talking about here? First, a word to women and girls. Teenage girls, little girls, 11-year-old girls, tallifer, old women, middle-aged women.

Women, when you dream about being strong, what do you dream about? You ought to dream about being strong. The Bible, this verse, doesn't say men only, women only. To Him who is able to strengthen you, men and women, what do you dream about? Little girls, what do you dream about? You're going to grow up to be a woman.

What is a strong woman? Before I answer that, which I will do from the Bible, let me just make sure that we get from Romans a generic statement about the kind of strength we're talking about. I don't think it's what the world means. I think it's Romans 1, 11, and 12.

This is like beginning with it and ending with it. Here's what he says. I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you.

That's the same word and it's the only other place in Romans that it occurs. I long to see you that I may impart some spiritual gift to you to strengthen you. That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, yours and mine.

So, I assume that at the heart of this strength is faith. Strong, unshakeable faith in Romans 8, 28 rooted in Romans 8, 32 which is the fight of earth's coming. He didn't spare his own son, but gave him up for us all so that Romans 8, 28 would come true.

The world, women, has some ideas for how you can be strong. And they scoff often at the Bible because the Bible is real clear that you are the weaker vessel which may mean only that 95% of adult men are stronger than 95% of adult women physically. It's just the way we're wired.

That has very little to do with it when it comes to the strength that Paul is talking about. Here are the three things the world wants you to become strong. Here are the three means you're going to hear over and over and over again.

These are the messages that little girls are going to get in school and in advertising. Number one, sex. Be sexy.

Dress sexy because men are suckers and you can get power over them with dressing the right way. Or, second suggestion from the world, be assertive, forceful, aggressive, self-confident. Third, be smart through all the channels of influence into the positions of power.

Now, none of those three ways to power is what Paul is talking about. Now unto Him who is able to strengthen you. Paul has in mind, for women at least, and then I'll give some generic things for both, 1 Peter 3.6, referring to Sarah, Abraham's wife, you are her children, women, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

Unless you think that's kind of an isolated statement that the Bible is summoning you to fearlessness in the face of anything that is frightening, listen to Proverbs 31.25. This is my favorite verse in the ideal woman there in Proverbs 31. I'm glad that I married one of these. Strength and dignity are her clothing and she laughs at the time to come.

That is a great verse, women. But you've got to believe with amazing firmness in Romans 8.28. Because there are some heavy things coming to you in your marriages, in your kids, in this world. Heavy, weighty, hard things.

Things that aren't designed for women. And you're supposed to meet them fearlessly with your friends or with your family. So, women, little girls, dream of being so confident in God and who you are in God as the daughter of the King and what He's done for you and promises He's made to you and what He plans to be for you that you fear nothing but God and laugh at the time to come no matter what it holds.

I promise you, you don't need me to tell you this, though the way some act, you would think you did, so I'll say it. Sexiness you will not always have. That's clear.

Number two, assertiveness will alienate the very people you want to be around. Go back to saying another thing about sexiness. The very man you conquer with it, you don't want him.

Got that? The very man who will be conquered by that, you don't want that man. When I'm done with Romans, I'll preach some sermons on sex someday because there's so much more I'd like to say. Third, halls of power, they are like grass.

They flourish for a season, the wind passes over it, and it is gone. In other words, women like men, you want a kind of strength that doesn't vanish at the very moment you need it. What if your strength has been sex and the very moment is it's gone? It's gone.

It'll never come again. He's gone and it's gone and it'll never come again. What then? Oh my! Enough for women.

Dream a dream, women. And don't let the world shape it. Men, boys, little boys, what about you? What do you dream about? I heard an awful statistic about the men in this church the other day about how many don't pump with their wives, don't lead their families.

Is your dream to be the kind of guy who can hold an Altoids tin and be curiously strong? Is that it? Go pump a little iron and try to be like that. Be the best person in sports. Best stockbroker.

Money is power. Be savvy. Gonna have savvy? We'll lick this thing.

Buy low, sell high. Cools. Smart.

Savvy. Power. Is that it? Get a life.

Or maybe the education route, read Atlantic Monthly, listen to NPR and drop obscure names at cocktail parties. Who's that? You don't know who that is? Listen, only a fool wants fading power. I mean, come on, wake up! Only a fool wants fading power, men.

Men! Don't invest there! I'll tell you where I want you to dream. I want you to dream about the kind of power that only the Gospel can give. It goes like this.

Things like this. It's the power to lead your wife and family in devotions if you're married. Or maybe get the guys together in the apartment if you're single.

I'll tell you guys, it takes more power to pray out loud in front of your wife if you haven't done it for 20 years than it does to do anything else on the planet. Do you want to be strong or do you want to be a wimp? This is what the Gospel can do. Or, it's the power to say a simple word of truth when there's highly educated secular elitist complexity all around you and you just have a simple word of truth to say.

It's the power to stand your ground maybe teenagers here, listen, it's the power to stand your ground on a moral issue when they're going to say you're weak. It's a sign of weakness. And you know better.

They're weak. They're like a dog in heat. And you have strength all by yourself to endure those assaults.

You remember the verses that I shared with you back in February that were just almighty for me. There was that moment of, right after the biopsy comes back, doctor's sitting there, I mean actually he's on the telephone, but it was when he said, I think we need to do a biopsy. That moment.

When this stab of fear comes. It didn't last long, mercifully. And then came what? 1 Thessalonians 5, 9, and 10.

It's just as pure Gospel as you can get. He has not destined you for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for you so that whether you wake or sleep, you will live with Him. Peace like a river.

That's just Gospel. Perfectly timed. Perfectly applied.

Perfectly suited to my need. And that's why the Bible is so thick, is because there's so many different needs that you have and there's suitable places where the Gospel is unfolded for you so that if you immerse yourself in the whole book, always with an eye to what Christ has wrought for you and purchased for you in this thick, glorious history of God's interaction with people, He will give you what you need. Therefore, everything in me says and hopes to say till the day I die, now unto Him who is able to strengthen me according to Paul's Gospel, to Him, to that God, be glory forever and ever.

God came into history in Jesus Christ. He died in order to destroy the power of hell and death and Satan and sin. And He did it through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, I know that there are people watching this video and in this room who are not trusting Jesus Christ and therefore can only expect condemnation. And so, I'm just going to plead with you here at the end. Lay down that rebellion.

Lay it down. And simply embrace the Gospel that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Righteous One, died for your sins. He was raised on the third day, triumphant over all His enemies.

He reigns until He puts all of His enemies under His feet. Forgiveness of sins and a right standing with God comes freely through Him alone by faith alone. And therefore, I plead with you, don't try to be strong in your own strength.

It will not be there when you need it. Only one strength will be there when you need it. The strength that God gives according to the Gospel.

Don't put it off. Father, I plead with you that this Advent season of landing out of our seven year experience of the Gospel that Paul preached would be a saving season at Bethlehem. People would come out of darkness into light and out of death into life and out of rebellion into submission and out of unbelief into faith and out of vain strength into true strength.

We are so thankful that You magnify Your glory not by keeping us weak but by making us strong according to the Gospel. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen. For more information visit www.fema.org

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