

Strengthened by Grace

1 Samuel 30

“¹ Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag and burned it with fire² and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way.³ And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.⁴ Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep.⁵ David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel.⁶ And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.⁷ And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, 'Bring me the ephod.' So Abiathar brought the ephod to David.⁸ And David inquired of the LORD, 'Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?' He answered him, 'Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue.'⁹ So David set out, and the six hundred men who were with him, and they came to the brook Besor, where those who were left behind stayed.¹⁰ But David pursued, he and four hundred men. Two hundred stayed behind, who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor.¹¹ They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. And they gave him bread and he ate. They gave him water to drink,¹² and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten, his spirit revived, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights.¹³ And David said to him, 'To whom do you belong? And where are you from?' He said, 'I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago.¹⁴ We had made a raid against the Negeb of the Cherethites and against that which belongs to Judah and against the Negeb of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire.'¹⁵ And David said to him, 'Will you take me down to this band?' And he said, 'Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this band.'¹⁶ And when he had taken him down, behold, they were spread abroad over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah.¹⁷ And David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled.¹⁸ David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives.¹⁹ Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all.²⁰ David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him, and said, 'This is David's spoil.'

²¹ Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the brook Besor. And they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. And when David came near to the people, he greeted them.²² Then all the wicked and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, 'Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may lead away his wife and children, and depart.'²³ But David said, 'You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given us. He has preserved us and given into our hand the band that came against us.²⁴ Who would listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who

goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They shall share alike.’²⁵ And he made it a statute and a rule for Israel from that day forward to this day.²⁶ When David came to Ziklag, he sent part of the spoil to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, ‘Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD.’²⁷ It was for those in Bethel, in Ramoth of the Negeb, in Jattir,²⁸ in Aroer, in Siphmoth, in Eshtemoa,²⁹ in Racal, in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, in the cities of the Kenites,³⁰ in Hormah, in Bor-ashan, in Athach,³¹ in Hebron, for all the places where David and his men had roamed.” (1 Samuel 30)

Introduction

Talk about things going from bad to worse. Can you relate? You're having a really difficult day at work and you think, "It's alright ... I just need to make it through this shift and then when I get home everything will be all better!" Only to walk into your home as you realize that things have went from bad to worse. UGH ...

This is what has happened to David and his men after they were sent home from the battlefield by the Philistines. David and his men must have felt a huge burden had been lifted as they make the long journey home. Imagine that after walking about 60 miles in just a couple days that they just want to enjoy some rest and relaxation, however as they reach their town it's then that they quickly realize that their troubles have just begun. They return home to find that the Amalekites have attacked their town "² and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way." When David and his men realized what has taken place in their absence, they "*raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep.*" This is a really bad day and to make matters worse look at how David's men respond, "*the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters.*"

Things really have gone from bad to worse for David. Have you ever found yourself overwhelmed and troubled with many problems like David? I know that I have and yet I want us to notice that this coming to the end of his rope is just the thing that God uses to bring David to his knees and to himself. This is grace.

David has reached the end of his strength. Notice in verse 4 it says, David and his men "*wept until they had no more strength to weep.*" Here is the beauty of the text though because it is exactly in this moment of David's strength failing that God's strength kicks in and that is the strength that David, you and I desperately need. See it right in verse 6: "⁶ *And David was greatly distressed ... But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.*" The question that immediately pops into my mind is this, what does finding strength in the Lord look like and how then do you strengthen yourself in the Lord? Good question! This is what I want to spend much of our time looking at today.

The first thing is I want to make a quick mention of what it does not look like. Think back with me to the beginning of chapter 27 when David had been running for his life from the deranged king Saul and he began to despair, which has led to the mess that he finds himself in currently. It says, "*Then David said in his heart, ‘Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines.’*" (1 Sam. 27:1a) David let his heart speak and found not the answers that he needed as his faith was wavering. He was struggling to believe that God was going give him the kingdom. Don't get me wrong, what

your "heart" is thinking and feeling matters greatly. It is kind of like the indicator lights on the dashboard of your vehicle. They alert you that there's something not right. That is fine and good, but what you do with that information is where you can get yourself into trouble. David knew that something was off as he began talking to himself, instead of preaching to himself! The first thing that we must recognize is that we must not let our hearts speak as though they are all knowing. Remember ...

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"
(Jeremiah 17:9)

Alright, that is what not to do but that still does not answer the question of what does finding strength in the Lord look like and how then do you strengthen yourself in the Lord? In order to answer this I got some help from my friend John Piper where he gives a five-step acronym of how we can serve and fight the good fight of faith by the strength that God supplies. He calls this A.P.T.A.T. I find this very helpful in my own life and I hope you do as well. I really do think that you will see this method clearly in our text today.

We must ADMIT that apart from Jesus we can do nothing.

This may seem like a strange place to start for gaining strength. This is completely opposite of what we normally would think regarding strengthening ourselves. That is because we generally think of ourselves in terms of autonomous, however we are truly a needy and dependant creature. If you and I were able to see into the spiritual world for one instance, then you would see clearly that you and I my friends are spiritual quadriplegic's.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

It is so important that we start here because it shows utter dependency on God for mercy and grace to show up in our time of need. This is what humility looks like in the life of the believer. This is exactly what is happening with David here in our text for today as we see him weak and needy. This state of helplessness is what brings us to our knees in prayer. People who foolishly think that they have it all figured out are not people who are known for their prayer life. It is only the weak and needy who by God's grace draw near to God in their time of need. This is the next step in A.P.T.A.T.

We must PRAY for God's help in our time of need.

In order to strengthen ourselves in the Lord we must go to the One who is able to supply the strength. Prayer is the lifeline to the One true God who has the power over life and death. Sadly there are many times it seems that this is our last resort. Think about it. Do you remember the last time that you heard David go to God in 1 Samuel? The last time David had asked for the ephod was back in chapter 23:9, and we have not heard him speak of God since chapter 26! We are talking a long time between those chapters. Prayer is vital for the believer. Martin Luther would go as far as to say, "To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing." We must go to God in prayer.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”
(Matthew 7:7)

“You do not have, because you do not ask.” (James 4:2c)

“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” (Psalm 50:15)

This is exactly what David does as he seeks help through Abiathar the priest and the use of the ephod in order to gain access to God's presence. Listen ...

“⁷ And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, ‘Bring me the ephod.’ So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. ⁸ And David inquired of the LORD, ‘Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?’ He answered him, ‘Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue.’”

Remember that you and I don't have Abiathar the priest or the ephod. We have someone much greater in Jesus Christ who is our great high priest and he has made a way for us to *“draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* Many times the mercy and grace that is supplied comes in the form of endurance. However for David the Lord clearly tells him to pursue the thieving Amalekites and promises victory. David now must trust God and that leads to the next step in A.P.T.A.T.

We must know and TRUST the promises of God.

I say know and trust because you will not trust what or whom you do not know. Question. Does our suffering cause us to run to God and his promises in the Bible? Here I want to be ever so careful because I think that many times our culture, and even in the church where we will run to, view the promises of God as though they are magical incantations. Right?!? Anxious? *“Do not be anxious about anything,”* (Philippians 4:6a) Sad? *“Rejoice always.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:16) Suffering? *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds.”* (James 1:2) Not able to bench press 3,000 pounds? *“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”* (Philippians 4:13)

The problem is not that these words are not true or powerful! They are! These words are living and active! The problem is that many times they are detached from knowing God's character and if we don't know the character of God then we will not trust his promises even if they are true. God is not some sky piñata' that we get to go and whack with our prayer stick until all the goodies come falling from the sky. He doesn't work like that because many times there is not a quick fix to the situations we find ourselves in. We must personally know God if we are to trust him and his promises because this is where real strength comes from. David did — look again at the wording of the end of verse 6: *“But David strengthened himself in the LORD HIS God.”* So here are some promises to remind yourself of and to teach others in their time of need.

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

“From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him.” (Isaiah 64:4)

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” (2 Corinthians 9:8)

“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Philippians 4:19-20)

Many people claim to know God but as we look closer, it becomes clear that what they mean is that they know about God. Often our relationship with God sadly resembles the way people know each other on social media forums. Let's pretend that we have a mutual friend through social media named “Jimmy.” Last week he posted about his vacation with his family and you and I end up in a conversation about our mutual friend. I then say “oh yea I know Jimmy. I had just seen that he and his family went to South Carolina for a beach vacation.” In response you're like “oh cool, I bet he went to stay at Loretta's family beach house.” I look at you strangely and you ask, “what's the problem?” I say, “oh nothing. I'm not sure who Loretta is or what you're talking about.” You look at me puzzled and respond with a “really? Loretta is his wife of 45 years and they meet at that home and that is where they got married.” Then you ask, “I thought you knew Jimmy?” I respond with a “we'll I do ... kind of!?!? I mean I never have meet him, but we're friends on Facebook.”

Would you say that I know Jimmy? Of course not! I know about him and this is how many of us approach our relationship with God. I want you so desperately for you to see, know and trust God for who he really is in and through his word, and in return to have the joy of knowing him! Our ignorance of the character of God has led professing Christians to be very weak in the Lord. This lack of truly knowing God has led us to become confused, ignorant, and frail in our faith. Get to know your God. And, as you do, it will show itself in obedience. This is what we see in David's life as sets off after the Amalekite thieves with his 600 men. David proves that he trusts God as he obeys him and that leads to the next step in A.P.T.A.T.

**We must ACT in obedience to God's word,
while expecting God to provide what he promises.**

Trust or faith always shows itself in action or obedience. Our believing affects our behaving. There is to be no sitting around hoping to get zapped into strength. Many times the strength that God supplies shows up as we take some steps in what he has called us to do. Christianity is not a spectator sport. The gospel is not simply about you getting your sins forgiven and then sitting around until Jesus "calls" you up to the big leagues or up to glory when he returns. The gospel must compel us to participate with Jesus in the world we live in right now today. Your family, church, neighborhood, workplace, and anywhere else you go needs you to engage now! Any gospel that does not compel us into obeying King Jesus overlooks both the duties and delights of being a Jesus follower! Listen to 1 Peter 4:10:

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies — in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

God gives gifts to His people to bless others and bring Himself glory! Each and every one of us has received at least one gift, so that we will use it to build up the church in health and size. We are not to keep these gifts for ourselves but use them faithfully as stewards of God's grace. We are stewards of those gifts. Peter breaks it down with two types of serving through word and deed and we obey the call to serve by God's power.

Speaking Gifts: When we speak, we speak in God's power!

Serving Gifts: When we serve, we serve in God's power!

You may be sitting here thinking that this all sounds so impossible because I am so weak and in one sense you're right. We cannot do anything of eternal value without the Holy Spirit empowering us! So admit it, but then pray and trust that you have been empowered by God in order to glorify God in all that you do. Trusting and obeying him to do all he promises to do is what makes God look glorious in our lives.

So David and his 600 men are in hot pursuit of the Amalekite thieves, but 200 of David's men tap out because they are too exhausted to continue. David doesn't even blink because he trusts God as he continues to pursue. As he goes, he comes across an Egyptian slave who has been abandoned by the Amalekites, which proves to be a bad move on their part because the slave leads David and his men to his former masters.

David and his men roll up on the Amalekites who were *“spread abroad over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah.”* Talk about God's mercy once again. It appears that these men are too drunk and too full to put up a fight against 400 weary, but strong in the Lord, men. This is bad news for these thieves. Listen: *“¹⁷ And David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled.”* God did what he said he would do and then some, which is grace! This leads us to the last step in A.P.T.A.T.

We must THANK God for whatever good comes our way, which glorifies him.

Thankfulness is an indicator of someone who is strong in the Lord. It shows that you've been a recipient of grace.

“Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:20)

“The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me.” (Psalm 50:23a)

David and his men had plenty to be thankful for because everything was recovered! Look: *“¹⁸ David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives.¹⁹ Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all. ²⁰ David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him, and said, ‘This is David's spoil.’”* So David and his men start their long journey back home and they run into the 200 men who were left behind. Look: *“²¹ Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the brook Besor. And they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. And when David came near to the people, he greeted them. ²² Then all the wicked and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, ‘Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may lead away his wife and children, and depart.’”* Notice that some of David's men do not want to share the goods that were recovered.

But David will have none of this kind of talk or thinking. Look: “²³ *But David said, ‘You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given us. He has preserved us and given into our hand the band that came against us.’*” David gives thanks and glory to God and proves himself to be generous. The reason that he is enabled to be generous is because he rightly understands that the battle belongs to the Lord, and therefore everything gained belongs to him as well!

David a generous king who gives to his people. He gives to the men who fought with him. He gives to the ones who could go no further. He gives to the leaders of Judah! David is strong in the Lord and his strength shows up in how generous he is with all that the Lord has provided. David's generosity should remind us of the one who gave all, Jesus! Remember that generosity is a gospel issue!

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)

Jesus, the strongest man ever, showed his strength most evidently in his generosity! He was so generous that he gave of himself for our salvation! Jesus gave himself for the church!

