

The Lord is My Strength

Lent 4

Pastor Josh Frazee

Isaiah 12:1-6

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is one of those times I wish I were more of a singer. I spent several minutes trying to find a hymn for us to sing as our Hymn of the Day only to find that it was the Old Testament Canticle from a service we don't know yet: the Service of Prayer and Preaching. If you want to follow along as I read it, the Canticle begins on page 261 in the front of your hymnals. Here's how it reads:

“The Lord God is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation. With joy will you draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: ‘Give thanks to the Lord, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the peoples, proclaim that His name is exalted.’ The Lord God is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation. Sing praises to the Lord, for He has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitants of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel. The Lord God is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen. The Lord God is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation (LSB, pp.261-262).”

The Canticle is directly pulled from our Old Testament text from Isaiah chapter twelve. This morning, we'll learn why this Canticle continues to be sung even today in New Testament times, and how it applies to our trek toward the cross, as we Behold the Man, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Verse 1

Our text from Isaiah begins with these words: “You will say in that day: ‘I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.’”

Isaiah prophesied “You will say in that day”—to which “day” was he referring? To find the answer, we go back a couple chapters to chapter ten. The first mention of “that day” is in chapter ten verse twenty where God says, “In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.” God was speaking about Ahaz, the king who had become king after his father Jotham, and after his grandfather Uzziah. God was referring to how King Ahaz had leaned on Assyria's protection, rather than believing in and trusting God, who had allowed him to ask whatever he wanted of God as a sign. But God said in our text “no more” “no more [would the Israelites] lean on him [that is, the Assyrians] who struck them.” God had told Isaiah to prophesy that there would be trouble to come, but God has Isaiah prophesy here in our text that He would not allow it to last forever. He would be sending a savior—and most importantly, a Savior from sin. On that day—the day of the coming of the Savior from sin—it would be said, ““I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me.””

Again, Ahaz had depended on the strength of Assyria to save him and all of Israel. At another time, Israel would even rely on Egypt's might for help—even though Egypt had formerly enslaved them! Far too often in their history, we see that the Israelites—God's chosen people—turned to the wrong strengths. That is why God said that they would say He had helped deliver them *despite His anger against them*. When the people, and even their king, King Ahaz, trusted other powers rather than His, God became angry—and rightfully so. They were trusting others for their help, not God, and so they were committing idolatry, trusting in idols rather than God. And God had every right to be angry with them for it.

To whom, then, do you turn for your strength? Do you trust God, or do you trust in idols? If you trust other nations, your nation, your political leaders, your pastor, or anyone else to deliver you from evil, you are trusting an idol and not God. You are sinning. And God has every right to be angry with you for it.

Verse 2

Yet God had Isaiah prophesy that: ““With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: “Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.””

There is one thing that the Lord God has more of than anger, though; His love. His anger is His alien work; the work He desires to do and the work He does is loving His people, both the Israelites of old and us. His salvific love is as plentiful as the water from a well. God not only delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians—after which the bitter water was turned sweet (Ex. 15:23-25)—but He also promised to deliver them from the Assyrians, the Babylonian Captivity, and, ultimately, from their bondage to sin.

In sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to the cross, God paid the price for the sins of all of humanity. And there, from the cross, came another water. Once Jesus had bowed His head in death and gave up His soul, the soldier pierced His side, and from it flowed blood mixed with water. Jesus is the fountain for all life. He is the only place to find forgiveness, salvation, and life.

So in our text God was promising to free both the Israelites and all of humanity from their bondages. No longer would the Israelites be under the power of the Assyrians and no longer would humanity be bound to the punishment they deserve for their sins. And you, you are no longer bound to the punishment you rightly deserve for not keeping God first.

“And you will say in that day”—who is the “you”? Here it is plural. It is not just the priests who will joyfully proclaim the work of God in saving the Israelites, it will be all the Israelites who would be saved by God’s plentiful love. And when that greater day would come, that all of humanity would be freed from its bondage to sin, it would be more than just the Israelites who would be making joyful proclamation. It would be the Israelites, the Gentiles, and all who come to know His love for them in Jesus Christ—yes, even you. You will say in that day: ““Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted.””

Verse 3

And that proclamation would continue with the words: ““Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.””

In this Lenten season, these words sound very strange for us as we “Behold the Man” heading toward the cross. Hearing a command to rejoice and sing praises sounds very out of place. Yet even as we continue through the dry desert of Lent, we find oases of God’s love and salvation every Sunday. Sundays in Lent have been described as “mini-Easters” because it is on these days we still hear that thirst-quenching Good News of the Gospel. Our Alleluias may be gone and our music may be lessened, but that Good News is most definitely still present.

So we “Sing praises to the Lord, for [we know that] he has done gloriously.” We who have received the forgiveness of sins by our faith in Him desire for this Good News to “be made known in all the earth.” So we “Shout and sing for joy”—even now, in the middle of Lent—“for great in [our] midst is the Holy One of Israel.” Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham and Jacob and Isaac, the God of Isaiah and the prophets, is the same God who is all three God the Father, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son, Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who we behold as He goes to the cross to accomplish our salvation, as we already know that He has. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.