

Finding Inner Strength

A Sermon by Rev. Thomas L. Kline

"Then David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him ... But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (I Samuel 30:6).

Our subject this morning is "Inner Strength," finding inner strength and peace in the Lord, and then tapping that inner strength so that we can overcome the battles and challenges we face in our lives. Our text is taken from the first book of Samuel, and it is the story of David, King David of the Old Testament, fighting against the Amalekites. This was one of the lowest points in David's life. It was a time of great despair, almost unthinkable despair. David was fighting against the Amalekites, and during the battle, David and his men had built a small city where he and his soldiers would live. There they also brought their wives and children to live with them.

And one day disaster struck. One day, after returning from the battle, David and his men found their city ravaged by the Amalekites. The city had been burnt with fire, and all the women and children had been taken captive. It says that David and his men lifted up their voices and wept. And then, to make matters worse, the men of David's army began to turn against David. They turned against their leader in their grief. They spoke of stoning David because of the loss of their families.

So here was David; he had despair over the loss of his family and now his own life was in jeopardy. And what did David do at that moment? And here we have that key sentence for this morning: "David went and strengthened himself in the Lord his God." David strengthened himself in the Lord.

David could have gone out immediately; he could have gathered his army to retrieve his women and children; he could have gone out in anger and fought against the Amalekites. But David took another path, an inner path. David stopped everything that he was doing, and took that moment to be with the Lord.

It was a time of distress, and the real strength to overcome that distress came from within. That inner strength then allowed David to go forth and fight the battles that lay before him. He went forth, and it says at the end

of the story, "He recovered all." He brought back the women and children and he utterly defeated the Amalekites.

What would be the most precious gift you could ever receive? If you could have any one thing, any one wish to be granted; if you could change anything about your life, what would you wish for? It is interesting that when people really think about this, often the answer given is, "I would wish for inner peace. Just give me the inner peace and strength to deal with those things I face out there in my life." Because the fact is, there are always going to be issues that we face out there in the external place of our lives. There are always going to be strife, distress, challenges, and hurdles. We can't change all those life situations out there, but what we can change is what is within us to gather the strength here in our hearts to rise above those life situations, and to be able meet those challenges out there with love, wisdom, compassion, and spiritual strength.

For the parent to deal calmly, compassionately, and wisely with his children or teenagers, what parent doesn't wish for that wisdom? For the boss to be wise, understanding, fair in dealing with his employers; for us to be truly caring in human relationships; for us to be able to have strength in times of tragedy, inner strength and inner peace are the source of it all.

King Solomon, when he was asked by the Lord for any one gift, chose wisdom. He could have had riches, wealth, fame and power, but he chose wisdom. And because he chose wisdom, it says that every other gift was given to him as well.

Inner peace and strength in the Lord, our message this morning: the potential for this inner strength and peace is there in each of our lives. There is a chamber of your mind, an inner chamber, where you can go and strengthen yourself in the Lord your God. And there you can gather strength to meet those challenges that stand out there in life.

I want to list some teachings given in the Writings of the New Church, teachings about what is called our "interior man" your interior man, and we all have one, that inner region of your minds where the Lord dwells.

Teaching number one: "The internal man is the gate or entrance of the Lord into man" (AC 1940). We have a choice. We have a choice to open that interior degree of our minds to God and let His life inflow, or we can

keep that interior degree of our mind closed, to keep it downward to the world. It reminds us of the words of Jesus, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20).

Here is a second passage from the Writings that has to do with inner strength during battle and temptation. We read, "When a man perceives anything fighting and conquering [for him], he may know that it is from the influx of the Lord through the internal man" (AC 978). You find things working in your life; you find yourself making progress, and where is that strength coming from? It is from the Lord, flowing down from within.

The third teaching has to do with our relationship to our neighbor. Think of a time when you are dealing with a difficult person. Every time you talk to that person you find negative emotions rising. No matter what you do, you find that person can "pull your strings" or "push your buttons." You find yourself coming down to his level; you become defensive; you find anger. But picture a time (and this happens to all of us) when you are talking to that difficult person and you find that you can rise above your negative feelings. Even when they are wrong or "off the wall," you find that you can be there for them with compassion and understanding. What one of us wouldn't wish for that degree of understanding? Listen to this passage from the Writings:

"When a person thinks well concerning the neighbor, wants to perform kind offices for the neighbor, and when he feels that he pities the neighbor who is in calamity and still more the neighbor who is in error, then he may know that he has the internal things in him through which the Lord operates" (AC 1102.3).

And here we are not just talking about skills, not just some fancy listening technique, but it is a time we are truly there for that person. It genuinely comes from the heart. That's inner strength that comes from the Lord.

A fourth teaching: We might think that going within to gather inner strength is a kind of fleeing from our problems, but listen to this passage. It says that inner strength filters down into the external events of our lives. "When the interiors have been formed in heaven, then the things which are there inflow into the exteriors which are from the world and form them to correspondence, that is, that they may act as one with them" (HH 351).

The exterior things of life begin to act as one; they begin to change our life down here. One passage from the Writings uses the word "harmony" in describing the relation between the internal and external man.

One last teaching: the interior man is who you are for eternity. "Therefore, such as a man is as to his interiors, such he remains to eternity" (HH 501).

I want to end with a statement about prayer, the power of prayer. Prayer is vital to this subject of inner strength. In our story we saw that David strengthened himself in the Lord. But the question remains: how did he do this? How did David strengthen Himself in the Lord? Here was David in terrible distress, and it says that David went to the priest and commanded that the ephod be brought to him. In the tabernacle, the high priest would put the ephod over his heart and enquire of the Lord how he should lead the people. And we are told that the Lord would answer the high priest by the flashing of the stones in the ephod. The ephod pictures prayer. The ephod pictures our talking to God.

We can picture David holding the ephod in his hand, and it says that he "inquired of the Lord what he should do." And the Lord gave him an answer at that moment. While David held onto the ephod, the Lord told him to pursue the Amalekites, and the Lord gave him the assurance that he would overtake the enemy and "without fail recover all who had been lost."

How do we strengthen ourselves in the Lord our God? Through prayer, or what the Writings call speech with God. We go into that closet of our mind, we shut the door, we pray to our Father in secret, and our Father who will reward is openly.

And this is important: we strengthen ourselves through prayer, both before and during times of need. Before times of need that's our daily prayer and meditation. Daily, even when things are going well in our lives, we go to that inner chamber of our minds and talk with God so we can build up inner strength before we need it daily prayer so that we can be accustomed to opening that inner door and feeling the inner strength that is there, and then when tragedy strikes, or when challenges face us, to pray that moment as well, as did David, so that we can tap that strength to meet the challenges that stand before us.

Let us read the story again from scripture: "But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. And David said to Abiathar the priest, 'Please bring the ephod here to me.' So David inquired of the Lord saying, 'Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?' And the Lord answered him, 'Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all.'"

The potential for this inner strength and peace is there in each of our lives. There is a region of your mind where we can go and find peace and strength in the Lord our God. It is a strength that we can tap so that we can overcome the battles and challenges we face in our life. And with His help, you will find peace in your God. Amen.

Lessons: 1 Samuel 30:1-19; Matt. 6:1-24; AC 2535; HH 351:2