

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

...as follows in Jesus' name:

I will love You, O Lord, my strength.

The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust;
My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

I will call upon the Lord, *who is worthy* to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies.

The pangs of death surrounded me, And the floods of ungodliness made me afraid.

The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me.

In my distress I called upon the Lord, And cried out to my God;

He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, *even* to His ears. (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

People loved by God, especially you, Jennifer and Ryan,

Jennifer, something that you said the other day seemed rather insightful,

and I am guessing that it isn't something that was true just about Joe,

but could be said for many people who have served in the military,

especially in the Marines ... and especially during a time of conflict.

You mentioned that for Joe's 4 years of service, the Marines owned him,

and for the next 30 years his service defined him,

and for his last few years they controlled him again, as the aftermath of his service came to roost.

Anyone who saw Joe's hats or his vehicles or his clothing or the harnesses worn by his support dogs

would have no doubt that Joe was proud to have served his country as a Marine,

and to have served in Desert Shield & Desert Storm.

But that service came at a serious cost to Joe and to those who loved him.

He returned to the States alive, but definitely a changed and changing man.

Some of those changes took some time to reveal themselves.

Should we wonder why warriors returning from conflict zones might suffer from PTSD.

Combat zones are one traumatic situation after another, and usually not just of a day or two,
but for months.

Fear for your own safety ... fear for the safety of your friends and your unit.

And yet you are trained not to run away from the danger, but to engage it.

Combat zones are places where moral injuries are bound to scar you ... to burden your conscience:

for things done under orders ... or decisions made on your own, or with your buddies;

good decisions made in split seconds, but with serious and permanent consequences;

or sinful decisions made, calculated or impulsively.

But there is also the physical toll.

Some warriors have the physical scars of bomb blasts, bullets and shrapnel, and other such injuries.

Others are affected by chemical warfare that disrupts the natural course of the body's systems.

And I am sure that one could go even further down this path...

But even if you are blessed to make it out of such a war zone without even a scratch,

there is a guilt that many have felt for that very thing... for making it out alive,

while others... your friends...or people you considered more deserving to live, were killed in action.
It was a hard day and hard time after Joe had heard that all the men from his unit had died.
It wasn't true... there are still a number with us...
but for a time, after he heard that everyone else was dead,
he was in deep despair, questioning even the validity of his own life.

...

But while we may or may not understand all these injuries and traumas,
we have a Psalmist who does.

Psalm 18 wasn't written by a soft civilian living 1,000s of miles from the front line,
idealizing the metaphoric battle between good and evil from the safety of his ivory tower.

It was written by David, **the servant of the Lord,**
who spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day that the Lord delivered him
from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.

This was the David who boldly ran up against the giant Goliath while he was but a youth
without any other armor except the name of the Lord;

the David who fought in hand-to-hand combat,

who saw the faces of every man he killed on the battle field;

the David who, though always faithful and obedient to King Saul, had been hunted down by Saul
as if he were a traitor and usurper as **the floods of ungodliness made him afraid.**

He knew what it is to make split-second decisions **in his distress;**

He knew what it is to make sinful calculated plans in his anger (Nabal, the Carmelite);

He knew what it is to see brothers in arms fall next to you and yet he survive;

He knew what it is like to feel **confronted by death.**

...

And yet, he boldly and confidently calls upon the Lord.

He calls Him his **rock, shield, fortress, & stronghold,** his **strength** and his **deliverer.**

But note that while he was certainly speaking of protection from real physical enemies on the battlefield,
his confidence springs from the Lord's promise to save him from his spiritual enemies as well.

Did you hear David also call the Lord the "**horn of my salvation**"?

And did you note that he recognized the Lord **hearing him from His temple?**

That was the place of atonement.

That was where God's sacrifices were slaughtered according to His own promises of forgiveness.

That was where God promised to be for His people, to meet them and hear them.

But as good as it is to recognize that David was inspired to write this Psalm for our use,
to embolden us in our afflictions and to teach us to fear, love, and trust in God above all things,
it is even more important that you hear Jesus' praying this Psalm for you and with you.

Listen to Jesus as He calls **the Lord His rock and His fortress and His deliverer,**

My God, My God, My strength, in whom I will trust.

Even as His Father forsook Him, as the **pangs of death surrounded Him** on the cross,

and **the snares of death confronted Him, in His distress He called upon the Lord,**
commending His spirit into His Father's hands.

The Lord heard His voice from His temple — the atonement seat, the mercy seat of God —
and 3 days later, delivered Him from death by raising Him from the dead.

...

Now this is all well and good you might say, but what about Joe.

He wasn't necessarily a righteous warrior like David, it is unlikely that he went into battle with the words of Psalm 18 (or any other Scripture) on his lips.
He was a little rough, and not just around the edges.
And he struggled with many temptations, and angers, and anxieties, and plenty of other things.
Am I attempting to preach him into heaven, as if he were a saint throughout his life here on earth?
No, but I had the opportunity to do that while he was yet alive.

If you will indulge me, I would like to briefly recount what I believe will be a fond pastoral memory.
Many of you know that Joe had been dealing with plenty of medical issues these last years.
Several months ago, when he first went into the hospital for a week, I went to visit him.

He was agitated and anxious, nervous and, I dare say, scared.
The doctors were giving him his options for treatment and hospice was one of those options.
Here was the Marine once again **confronted with death**,
except he didn't have a weapon and in no condition with which to fight back.
And I think it's also accurate to say that **the flood of** guilt from his own **ungodlinesses**
in his past **made him afraid**.

So we confronted those fears. We spoke about the sin. We didn't hide it or sweep it under the rug.
And then he heard about his Savior, Jesus Christ, yet again, his **deliverer** and his **horn of salvation**.
He heard again how Jesus took all that guilt upon Himself and gave Joe His perfection in its place.
You know, sometimes you don't know how things will land.

Joe had heard that message before in instruction classes... at His baptism... and in many sermons,
and yet it seemed as if he were hearing it for the first time.

I came back a few days later and, desiring to review our conversation before, I asked him,
"Joe, why should God let you into heaven?"

His gruff, agitated answer in his southern drawl was, "Well, you told me last time I was."

After explaining to him that I wasn't questioning his faith, just listening for his confession of faith,
I appreciated how he had understood the absolution that I was blessed to declare to him last time.

Fast forward to two of the last few visits that I had with him (this time at home).

He was sitting up in his bed, and as I recall, in moderate pain for him, but not wanting to take the drugs.
He was not agitated, nor did he give off the impression that he was fearful...even as death was nearer.
In fact, I remember commenting to him that while we were meditating on Mary and Martha's
conversation with Jesus at Lazerus' death and resurrection, Joe even had a smile on his face,
not because there had been a joke or anything humorous said, but, I believe,
because the Lord had given him certainty of his own salvation and he could live... & die... in peace,
the same peace and boldness and confidence with which David prayed in Psalm 18,
the same peace and boldness and confidence with which Jesus died,
commending Himself into His Father's hands.

So the Marine finally felt confident that he had the right weapon with which to confront death,
He had the **horn of his salvation: Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth, and the Life;**
his rock, shield, fortress, strength and Deliverer.

That same weapon is yours, too.

In the face of all your enemies, whether physical or spiritual, you can be bold and confident
because Christ's death and resurrection is your **shield, strength, and deliverance.**

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria