

Series FolkSongs of Faith

The Message In Remembrance of the LORD's Help

Scripture Psalm 18:1-29

Psalm 18 is a very long writing of praise and thanksgiving, 50 verses in all, so we will divide it into two messages.

The Psalm, including the superscription, was originally included in the appendix to the Old Testament book of II Samuel, the book which gives us the history of David's life after the death of Saul. Hence, the words appear twice in the Old Testament (*see II Samuel 22*).

The superscription indicates that David wrote this Psalm after he had subdued his political enemies and after the kingdom of Israel was firmly established under his control. The borders of Israel had been pushed to their farthest limits and Israel was entering into its "golden age." This was the period when David was at the height of his powers and influence. Yet he identified himself as "the servant of the LORD." David gave honor to the LORD rather than singing praises about his own accomplishments.

It was not personal ambition which had pushed David into his role as king. He had been chosen and anointed to this position by the LORD while still a teenager. And it certainly wasn't his desire to become involved in one difficult situation after another. His selection by God did not exempt him from the many stressful circumstances of his life. It was his sense of call and his desire to please the LORD that motivated David to obediently push through his circumstances. David trusted the LORD for protection and safety because he was "the obedient servant of the LORD."

The outline of this Psalm is fairly obvious. There are three principal sections preceded with an introduction and followed with a conclusion. The introduction and conclusion have similar thoughts: David identified the LORD as his "Rock," the One who provided protection and safety during his times of trouble. The first main section is a description of how the LORD protected David's life and delivered him from many dangers. In the middle section, David described both his faithfulness to God and the LORD's faithfulness to those who, like David, follow Him. In the third of the three main sections we will learn how the LORD used David in defeating Israel's enemies.

We should keep in mind that the LORD rescued David from danger on numerous occasions over a period of several years. Psalm 18 does not refer to any specific episode. Rather, it is a composite description of the LORD's faithfulness in watching over David as he reflected on several years of past experiences.

Read Psalm 18:1-29

The Psalm begins with David verbalizing his love for God. The word translated "love" is a little unusual. It expresses the response of a person to the compassion and mercy of another. Just like a child expresses love for the mother's attention, David expressed his love for the LORD. David had an appreciation for the comfort, protection, and help provided by the LORD, and this Psalm is his declaration of love for what the LORD had done in his life.

David used several metaphors to describe the LORD. First of all, the LORD was David's "rock." The word "rock" is used numerous times in Scripture to convey something important about the nature of God. Just as a large rock is solid and unchangeable in its composition, God is the firm foundation for those who place their faith in Him. He is the source of their strength, stability, safety, and salvation.

This term "rock" is then further defined as a "fortress" and a "refuge." These were places of safety and protection for people who were in danger. The emphasis on protection is reinforced with additional military terms: "shield," "horn," and "stronghold." All of these metaphors were used by David to indicate the security and reliability of the LORD's care. The LORD had faithfully delivered David from his many adversities and adversaries, and this Psalm was David's loving and grateful response.

David consistently expressed his confidence in the LORD's ability to save him from his enemies. He called on the LORD many times because he encountered many dangerous situations, and his needs for protection were always met. This is why David declared that the LORD was "worthy of praise."

The first main section of the Psalm begins with verse 4 and extends to verse 19. In this passage David describes in poetic imagery the intensity of the dangers he frequently faced. His experiences were like death and the grave pulling him downward. Another metaphor is that of being buried by a torrent of destruction. The literal meaning of the word “destruction” is “evil,” hence David was referring to “a torrent of evil.” Yet another metaphor suggests that he was among the traps and snares set by hunters to catch animals. It was in times of distress like these that David called on the LORD for help, and, to his relief, the LORD heard his voice and moved into action.

The description of God’s response to his plea for help is written in remarkable picturesque language. The LORD’s intervention is pictured as a violent storm with thunder and lightning, high winds, hail, and black skies. It is not unusual for writers to use metaphorical and imaginative language to describe the unique happenings in their lives. You’ve heard the expression, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” This is why poetic images help us to understand what is otherwise incomprehensible. How can we, for example, grasp the awesome glory and power of God apart from the use of our imaginations? David sought to convey spiritual realities to us through word pictures. We can summarize this section by saying that God moved heaven and earth to bring deliverance.

The imagery indicates that the LORD was angry about the circumstances in which David was trapped, that He hurried to David’s aid in response to David’s prayers, and that He terrified the enemies with the brilliance of His presence and the sound of His voice. The LORD is pictured here as the Divine Warrior who breaks through all the defensive barriers on His way to the rescue of David.

From David’s standpoint, the LORD “reached down from on high and took hold of him, rescuing him from his enemies, and placing him in a spacious place,” which is the figurative description of a place free from pressure and stress, where a person can move about without fear of threat and danger. That, of course, was what David wanted and prayed for. He had been so hemmed in by enemies, and was so helpless in his circumstances, that only the LORD was capable of rescuing him. David viewed the LORD as his Support, the One who prevented the enemies from taking his life. Instead of his demise at the hand of his foes, he experienced a miraculous deliverance.

Throughout this section the pronouns refer to the LORD: “He parted the heavens and came down,” He made the darkness his covering,” “He thundered from heaven,” “He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies,” “He drew David out of deep waters,” He rescued David from powerful enemies,” “He brought him out into a spacious place.” David’s testimony was that the LORD had indeed rescued him. In Scripture, the mighty acts of deliverance by God are evidence of His love and compassion and concern for the well-being of His chosen people.

Notice at the end of verse 19, “The LORD rescued David because he delighted in him.” David is identified in Scripture as “a man after God’s own heart.” This statement is repeated in Scripture several times. (*See I Samuel 13:14 and 15:28; I Kings 14:8 and 15:5.*) There are also numerous Scriptures which describe the trust and confidence David placed in the LORD. David did not pray only in times of need, nor were his prayers just for help. He knew how to praise and thank the LORD in his times of comfort and prosperity. This Psalm is an example of his praise and worship.

David was also a delight to the LORD because he was willing to put himself at risk in order to bring honor to the LORD. For example, when he confronted the Philistine giant, Goliath, which no one else in Israel was willing to do, he said, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel. ... Today ... the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel” (*I Samuel 17:45-47*).

David consistently stood for righteousness in the midst of enemies who were rebelling against God. David did not want to be identified with such evil people. As we read in Psalm 17, David “resolved that his mouth would not sin. ... He kept himself from the ways of the violent.” He followed the ways of the LORD (*Psalm 17:3-5*). There were many reasons why the LORD “delighted in David.”

The next verses explain that the LORD rewards those who are faithful to Him. Notice that verses 20 and 24 have the same information: The LORD rewards people according to their righteousness and according to the cleanness of their actions. These verses help us to understand what “righteousness” and “blamelessness” mean in a practical sense. “Righteousness” means to keep the ways of the LORD, to do the things which please the LORD. “Blamelessness” means to avoid evil and to keep away from sin.

In order to practice righteousness and be blameless, it is necessary to know the ways of the LORD. Notice in verse 22 that the laws of the LORD were always before David and that he did not turn away from the decrees of the LORD. His habits were a delight to the LORD.

Righteousness depends on a person's response to the LORD. Righteousness requires the person to cling to the instructions of the LORD. Blamelessness, on the other hand, requires the person to keep away from all forms of evil. I want to insert a word of caution here. Scripture makes it clear that righteousness and blamelessness cannot be earned through self effort. Quite the opposite, they are described in Scripture as the joyous response of believers to all that a loving and merciful God does for them.

A short time after the Israelite slaves were rescued from Egypt, God promised to bless those of His people who walked in obedience to His will (*see Deuteronomy 28:1-14*). God also promised to punish those who did not (*Deuteronomy 28:15-68*). David was one of the faithful ones of later generations who was blessed. By recounting his own righteousness David was not implying that he merited God's favor simply because of his good works. Rather, he was presenting himself as proof of God's faithfulness to the covenant promises previously given to Israel.

In these verses, David was not saying, "LORD, you must reward me for all the things I have done for you." Instead, he was saying, "LORD, I love you so much that I have made every effort to please you." As we noted earlier, David's love for the LORD was expressed in the very first statement of this Psalm. Practically speaking, his love was evidenced by his obedience as a servant. God's laws regulated his life and enabled him to trust the LORD in all the challenges he faced. These verses explain the reasons why the LORD "delighted in him."

The next verses speak about the LORD's faithfulness to all His followers, about how He fulfills His promises. Notice in verses 25 through 29 how the LORD responds to His people. The principle can be stated very simply: He responds to people in the same way that they act toward Him. Note that the LORD treats each individual according to his or her attitudes. "To the faithful, the LORD shows Himself faithful." "To the blameless, He shows Himself blameless." "To the pure, He shows Himself pure." Then we have a contrast: "To the crooked He shows Himself 'shrewd,'" a curious translation which means that the LORD punishes those who are perverse and corrupt. The contrast is stated again in verse 27, "He saves the humble, but humbles those who think they can save themselves."

We must never forget this Biblical principle: The way the followers of the Lord relate to the Lord determines how the Lord relates to them. This principle is repeated in various ways in the New Testament. For example, the Apostle Paul wrote, "A man reaps what he sows" (*see Galatians 6:7-8*).

David, the man after God's own heart, was a wonderful example of how the LORD blessed those who were faithful. The LORD kept the lamp of David's life burning by delivering his life from the hands of his enemies. Another poetic way of making this point is that God turned the darkness of difficult circumstances into light. These statements are similar in meaning to what David wrote in another Psalm: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me." He also wrote, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (*Psalm 23:4-5*).

David is an example for us of how to have confident joy even when everything around us is in chaos. David understood that God had helped him overcome impossible circumstances, or, as he wrote in concluding this portion of this Psalm, "With the LORD's help, I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall."