

Series FolkSongs of Faith

This Message Part 2 of In Remembrance of the LORD's Help

Scripture Psalm 18: 30-50

In the previous message we covered about two-thirds of Psalm 18. Today we will complete our study of this very long Psalm. David was at the height of his powers and influence when this Psalm was written, yet he identified himself as “the servant of the LORD.” The emphasis of the Psalm is on praise and thanksgiving. David wrote this Psalm to express his gratefulness for what the LORD had done to help him get through the difficult years when he was pursued by Saul and other enemies.

Let me remind you of the structure of the Psalm. There are three main sections preceded with an introduction and followed with a conclusion. In the previous message we thought about the introduction and the first two sections. In the introduction, David declared his love for the LORD, whom he identified as his “Rock,” his fortress and refuge, the One he turned to in times of need.

The first main section was a poetic description of how the LORD protected David's life and delivered him from many dangers. The delivering power of the LORD was compared to a violent storm. In the middle section, David described his faithfulness to God. He had “kept the ways of the LORD” and “not done evil by turning from God.” As a result, the LORD had rewarded him by watching over him, protecting him, and strengthening him.

Today our focus is on the third of the three main sections and the conclusion. This third main section describes how the LORD used David in defeating Israel's enemies. This section is David's tribute to the LORD's actions.

Read Psalm 18:30-50

In the verses which concluded our previous study, David wrote about the LORD's faithfulness to His followers. He described how the LORD responds to His people: "To the faithful, the LORD shows Himself faithful." "To the blameless, He shows Himself blameless." "To the pure, He shows Himself pure." This is a Scriptural principle which was articulated by Moses to the second generation of Israelites who had been rescued from slavery in Egypt. To these people God said, "If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All my blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God."

The LORD then listed examples of the many blessings He would shower on His faithful people, and He then explained the reason He would bless them: "If you keep the commands of the LORD your God and walk in his ways, then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD and they will fear you, and the LORD will grant you abundant prosperity ... in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you" (*Deuteronomy 28:1-11*).

As I explained previously, the LORD established this very important Biblical principle that continues to apply to His followers, to us: The way we relate to the Lord determines how the Lord relates to us. There are blessings to those who are faithful and curses to those who do not follow Him. David is a wonderful example of how the LORD kept His promise to bless those who were faithful. David had "kept the ways of the LORD," and it was his testimony that the LORD "had rewarded him according to his righteousness and according to the cleanness of his hands" (*Psalms 18:20, 24*).

The first words in the reading today relate to that promise of the LORD given to Moses several centuries before David. What the LORD had promised then had worked out perfectly and flawlessly for David. He could write that the LORD had indeed been a shield for him, just as He is a shield "for all who take refuge in him."

Verse 31 is a unique Hebrew way of expressing appreciation and amazement about the LORD. The statements are made in rhetorical fashion, but they are the equivalent of saying, "There is absolutely no god in the world like the one who is my LORD." David had previously referred to the LORD as "the Rock" who was his firm anchor in life and provided his protection. In his exuberant Hebraic way he here exclaimed, "There is no other Rock we can depend on except my God."

Other Old Testament writers made similar statements. For example, after God had rescued the Hebrews from Egypt, Moses sang, “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (*Exodus 15:11*) The implied answer is, of course, none of them. Another example was Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel. She echoed the words of Moses and David, saying, “There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God” (*I Samuel 2:2*).

Beginning in verse 32 David began to list reasons why he considered God to be incomparable. Using picturesque language, David explained that God had made him strong and provided the guidance he needed. He explained that God had kept him from slipping when he was in the roughest and rockiest situations and enabled him to stand on high places beyond the reach of those who opposed him. David acknowledged that God had taught and guided him during his many years of stressful experiences. He acknowledged that he had been successful in many battles because God gave him the skills and strength he needed.

In addition, David knew that God had brought him to his exalted position as king of Israel. There are several possible translations for verse 35. Essentially the words mean that it was the goodness of God which elevated David to his place of greatness and was sustaining him. David took no credit for his achievements. He ascribed all his accomplishments to the fact that God had “stooped down to make him great.” What the LORD did is another example of the principle of blessing: God is close to those who are close to Him.

David also acknowledged that God had “broadened the paths beneath his feet.” Previously David was treading, figuratively and literally, on narrow mountain paths, and hiding in caves, and moving from one remote place to another, often just one step ahead of his enemies, but this was no longer the case in his life. By the time this Psalm was written, David was no longer troubled by enemies. He was able to live in freedom and comfort. God had given him the desire of his heart — the “spacious place” he mentioned in the first part of the Psalm.

As I said, this is the part of the Psalm in which David gives his testimony to the goodness of the LORD. David made it very clear that his earthly victories were not due to his own skills, strengths, or strategies. There was no pride of accomplishment in him. Verses 37 and 38 might suggest that David was bragging about his victories in battle, but if we keep these verses in context, we recognize that David was giving glory to the LORD who had “armed him with strength, ... made his adversaries bow at his feet,” and enabled him to “destroy his foes.”

In verses 41 and 42 David rather graphically described how his foes vainly “cried for help” while he “beat them as fine as dust borne on the wind,” and “poured them out like mud in the streets,” but this was not done in his own strength. David made it clear that the LORD “made his adversaries bow at his feet.” For several years the LORD had protected and “delivered him from the attacks of the people.” Then the LORD had enabled him to destroy his foes and elevated him to be “the head of the nations.” With the LORD on his side, David was assured of success.

What a contrast from what David reported in the first main section of this Psalm. In those verses, David described himself as near death, and desperately calling on the LORD for help. So thoroughly did the LORD help that David became the most powerful person in that region of the world. As David explained here, “as soon as the people of the surrounding nations hear me, they obey me; foreigners cringe before me. They lose heart; they come trembling.”

We must not lose sight of the LORD’s purposes in helping David become so successful. Four hundred years previously, Joshua and the Israelites were commanded to take over the land of Canaan. It was their promised land. All they had to do was take possession, and the LORD promised to help them displace all the pagan people groups that stood in the way of complete occupancy. Unfortunately, that generation and the other generations which followed did not do what God wanted them to do. It was four hundred years before there was another man who had a heart which pleased God, and through whom He would fulfill His promise. That man was David, and because David was eager to obey the LORD, and to defend the honor of the LORD, the LORD was willing to work through David so that Israel would, at last, be dominate in the land of Canaan.

Verses 45 through 50 are David's concluding statement of praise, a kind of summary or wrap-up of his reflection on the actions of God as he experienced them. The first statement of this conclusion is significant: "The LORD lives." David realized that only a living responsive God could be active in "real time," actively watching over and protecting him during his years of trouble. David concluded that the LORD's on-going attention to his circumstances was proof that God was actively involved in guiding his earthly circumstances. In contrast, most of David's contemporaries lived as if God were not a living reality. David wanted his readers to understand that the only reason he had accomplished so much and risen so far was the LORD's involvement in his life.

After the general statement that "the LORD lives," David wrote two phrases which clarified his meaning. "Praise be to my Rock" and "exalted be my Savior." This Psalm began with David's statement that the LORD was his "Rock," his fortress, and his deliverer. In reflecting on his life, David recognized that the LORD had protected him during those times when he was surrounded by enemies and his life was in jeopardy.

The parallel phrase is about rescue. In the first main section of the Psalm David described how God went to extraordinary lengths to destroy his enemies and save him. This Psalm is all about the LORD as Rock and Savior.

Notice the various ways in which God acted as David's "Rock" and "Savior:" He was the One who "avenged" David, who "subdued nations under him," who "exalted him above his foes," and who "rescued him from violent men." It is no wonder that David wanted to "praise the LORD among the nations," and to "sing praises to the LORD's name."

There are two words in the last verse which we need to remember: "He (the LORD) gives his king great victories;" and "He shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David." The word for "victory" is literally "acts (plural) of salvation" or "acts of deliverance." This is a direct reference to the acts of protection and rescue that David experienced. These are acts of "unfailing kindness" or "lovingkindness" extended to him by the LORD.

In this Psalm, David calls our attention to the magnificent character of our God. If we would reflect on all that God has done for us, I'm sure we would be able to write a Psalm of praise and thanksgiving. Maybe our writing will not compare to the poetic charm of David's, but we all have a story of God's salvation and His lovingkindness. We should be able to testify to the ways in which God has been watching over us, and, I hope, we will continue to rely on His lovingkindness in view of who He is and the promises He has given to us.