

A Psalm of Praise

2 Samuel 22

By [Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas](#)

Now I'm grateful to Billy for starting a little early. Actually he started when only the elect were here tonight! That's because, as you can see, we have a lengthy reading — 51 verses of what looks like a psalm and what is a psalm. It is Psalm 18 to all intents and purposes. Psalm 18 has been altered a little from the version we have here because what we have here is David's own personal reflection and Psalm 18 has been altered in order for it to be of use in public worship in the psalms of the temple perhaps. But perhaps you want to keep one eye on the eighteenth psalm. This is one of the six sections of the tail end of 2 Samuel that looks like an appendix — six different events and stories that the author of Samuel now brings to the end here. And perhaps one of the things that the author of 2 Samuel wants to do is to present David in a different light, perhaps a better light than he has been presented in at least the second half of Samuel from the incident with Bathsheba onwards. This is a psalm reflecting on the period when David was being pursued by King Saul. So this psalm covers that period, the second half of 1 Samuel and the first five chapters of 2 Samuel. Well now before we read this passage together, let's look to God in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the gift of Scripture, that You've given to us a Book, words, nouns and verbs and sentences that have meaning and precision that explain to us about Yourself and about the Gospel, about covenant love and mercy, about heaven and hell, warning us of things to avoid, urging us on things that we should make our own. Holy Spirit, we thank You for Your part in giving us this Book. Come now, we pray, and illuminate, cause our dull minds to understand that which we read. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Hear the Word of God:

And David spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said,

“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; You save me from violence. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.

For the waves of death encompassed me, the torrents of destruction assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me.

In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I called. From His temple He heard my voice, and my cry came to His ears.

Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations of the heavens trembled and quaked, because He was angry. Smoke went up from His nostrils, and devouring fire from His mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from Him.

He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under His feet. He rode on a cherub and flew; He was seen on the wings of the wing. He made darkness around Him His canopy, thick clouds, a gathering of water. Out of the brightness before Him coals of fire flamed forth. The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice. And He sent out arrows and scattered them; lightning, and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen; the foundations of the world were laid bare, at the rebuke of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of His nostrils.

He sent from on high, He took me; He drew me out from many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too mighty for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the LORD was my support. He brought me out into a broad place; He rescued me, because He delighted in me.

The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His rules were before me, and from His statues I did not turn aside. I was blameless before Him, and I kept myself from guilt. And the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in His sight.

With the merciful You show Yourself merciful; with the blameless man You show Yourself blameless; with the purified You deal purely, and with the crooked You make Yourself seem tortuous. You save a humble people, but Your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down. For You are my lamp, O LORD, and my God lightens my darkness. For by You I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall. This God — His way is perfect; the word of the LORD proves true; His is a shield for all those who take refuge in Him.

For who is God, but the LORD? And who is a rock, except our God? This God is my strong refuge and has made my way blameless. He made my

feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights. He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your gentleness made me great. You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip; I pursued my enemies and destroyed them, and did not turn back until they were consumed. I consumed them; I thrust them through, so that they did not rise; they fell under my feet. For you equipped me with strength for the battle; you made those who rise against me sink under me. You made my enemies turn their backs to me, those who hated me, and I destroyed them. They looked, but there was none to save; they cried to the LORD, but he did not answer them. I beat them fine as the dust of the earth; I crushed them and stamped them down like the mire of the streets.

You delivered me from strife with my people; You kept me as the head of the nations; people whom I had not known served me. Foreigners came cringing to me; as soon as they heard of me, they obeyed me. Foreigners lost heart and came trembling out of their fortresses.

The LORD lives and blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation, the God who gave me vengeance and brought down peoples under me, who brought me out from my enemies; You exalted me above those who rose against me; you delivered me from men of violence.

For this I praise You, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to Your name. Great salvation He brings to His king, and shows steadfast love to His anointed, to David and his offspring forever.”

Amen. May God bless to us that reading of His holy and inerrant Word.

An arctic explorer once said that, “It was so cold that our candle froze and we couldn't blow it out.” And another added, “Our words froze as we spoke and we had to fry them in order to be heard.” Exaggeration; hyperbole; like great fishing stories, “It was *that* big.” When did any of this take place that David is talking about? He's talking about the years of flight from King Saul and there were earthquakes, the heavens came down, the Lord swoops out of the clouds like some great raptor, thunder fills the air, the earth is shaken in its foundations, and David is snatched away seconds before the waters would have engulfed him. That's great stuff, but when did any of that happen? The truth is, it never really happened like that. So what is this?

And I want to say to you tonight on these closing hours of Easter, this is the language of faith. This is how believers talk because this is how believers see it. Believers see things the world doesn't see. Believers hear things the world doesn't hear — a God who is everywhere present; Jesus who rose from the dead and sits at God's right hand and upholds and governs every second of our lives so that all the events that overtake us are seen not so much from the perspective

of this world. From the perspective of this world, David was a fugitive, feigning madness among his enemies in order to escape the horrors of Saul's megalomania. There were no earthquakes; there were no swooping earthquakes coming out of the clouds; there were no waters parting. In the language of — what? David see himself here as another Moses. This is the language of Exodus. This is the language of the Pentateuch that David is employing here, the language of his Bible. And he's converting that language into praise language and he's saying, "This God is at work. He is at work in my life. Let me explain it to you. Let me describe it to you, to be sure, in the language of poetry and hyperbole, to be sure, but the language of faith; the language of faith."

In the time we have together tonight on what has been for some of you an exhausting day that began early, I want to just select three key texts in this psalm of David. The first are verses 2 and 3. "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior." This eight-fold description of God and what David is saying is that when times get tough, God is my security. When times get tough, God is my security. "He is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my shield, my horn, my stronghold, my refuge, my savior." It was Luther who said that "Christianity consists in personal pronouns." He loved *me*. He gave Himself for *me*. The Lord is *my* shepherd. He's not just a shepherd, a rock, a fortress, a deliverer. He's *my* rock, He's *my* shield, He's *my* defender.

Take a look at verse 7. "In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I called. From His temple He heard my voice, and my cry came to His ears." The Lord, you see, the Lord is just waiting to be triggered by prayer. That's what David is saying. And when God answers, when God answers it's like the exodus. It's thunder and lightning and swooping down and rescuing and destroying His enemies. This is the language of faith. You understand this language. Standing there alone, the ship is waiting, all systems are go — are you sure? Control is not convinced but the computer has the evidence. No need to abort. The countdown starts — 4, 3, 2, 1 — earth below us, drifting, falling! It's a car advertisement on TV. A Lincoln car. We all understand that language, the language of hyperbole. And David is saying, with the eye of faith, looking back to be sure — and looking back is always 20/20; it's easier to read providence from a distance. Like Flavel said, "It's like reading Hebrew — you have to read it backwards." And looking back, looking over that period when David's life was all but snuffed out, the times when David could have been destroyed, and what was it? It was the Lord. It was God. It was his rock, it was his defender, it was his savior, coming to deliver him.

Forgive me for getting personal, but have you ever spoken to Bryan Sumner's parents? Do you know Bryan Sumner? How old is he? Sixteen? He's broken his leg, been through twelve surgeries. How a helicopter came and swooped him out and brought him to UMC back in December. But have you spoken to his parents because this is the language that they use. "The Lord did this and the Lord did that and the Lord delivered and yes there was a helicopter but it was as though

God swooped down to help us in our time of need.” This is how Christians talk. This is how believers talk. They look back on providence, they look back on events and circumstances of great import when life was in danger, when people we love are threatened, and God delivered. And it was like the earth falling away. It was like God swooping down from the clouds and rescuing me because when times get tough, God is our security. God is our security. You know it. You have this testimony. You know what David is talking about. You can think back on events and circumstances that you can say, “Yes, He is my rock and He is my fortress and He is my deliverer and He is my savior.”

But there's a second key text that's a little more difficult. It's verses 21 and 22 and 23 and 24 and 25. I wonder what was going through your mind as we read this together. “The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His rules were before me, and from His statutes I did not turn aside.” That wasn't Dr. Elkin's prayer tonight. His prayer was that all our righteousness is filthy rags. “Don't look at my righteousness,” Dr. Elkin said, “but look to the Savior.” What is David saying here? This sounds like some kind of self-justification. This sounds like David has suddenly reverted to some kind of works-righteousness, that the reason God has come down and been his stronghold and deliverer and savior is because David did that which was right. He was in the right. He was righteous before God, that's the reason God came to him. That seems to run so contrary, doesn't it, to what the Bible teaches. Romans 3:10 citing of course Psalm 14 — “There is none righteous, no not one.” Isn't that one of the texts that we have at our disposal if we're doing any kind of evangelism? You know, the forty or fifty texts that we have in our head, that's one of them. “There is none righteous, no not one. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” David, what is this? He sounds like some self-righteous prig here. What's he doing?

Well you can view David from several perspectives here. You can take this interpretation — you can say what David is really saying is not that he's blameless, blameless in the sense that he's sinless. That's not what he's saying. He saying, “My cause was just.” He was the anointed king. Saul was a megalomaniac. God had anointed him. God had set him in this place. He was, in that sense, in the right. Maybe that's what he's saying, that he had a just case, a bit like Job does in the book of Job. He's arguing that he has a good case. He's in the right. He's blameless in that sense and God comes to the side of the one who's in the right.

Or maybe David is talking here not so much about justification but about sanctification, that there were times in his life when he walked with the Lord, when he endeavored to keep the commandments of God. It was his aim, it was his desire, it was his goal.

Or maybe David is saying something entirely different here. Maybe what David is

saying here is he's in covenant with God. What does Paul say in Romans 1:16? "I am not ashamed of the Gospel for therein is" — what? "The righteousness of God revealed." How is the Gospel great, Paul? Tell it to me again. It's great because it reveals the justice of God. It reveals the righteousness of God. How does that work again? How is that great, that the Gospel demonstrates the righteousness of God? Even Luther didn't get it at first. That was the text over which Luther tripped. How could the Gospel be good news if it fundamentally revealed the righteousness of God? And then he got it because in Christ, in Christ it revealed the righteousness of God that sin is punished but it's not punished in me. It's punished in Jesus, so that in union with Jesus, He received the wrath of God and I receive the blessings so that if any man be in Christ he is a new creation. If you're in Christ, you are essentially a covenant keeper. If you are in Christ, you are essentially a law keeper because as Dr. Elkin prayed tonight, "Don't look at me, look at Jesus, because as a I stand before you, I stand before you in union with One who is perfect."

And I think that's what David is saying here. David has a glimpse here in the Old Testament that is in fact a glimpse of the Gospel because in covenant with God he was righteous. In covenant with God he was a justified person. He stood in a right relationship with God. Do you know what the New Testament says to one who is in a right relationship with God? That "He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He's faithful *and* just, *and* just, because in Christ, in Christ He cannot do anything other than forgive your sins. That's what justice means; that's what righteousness means. If you're in union with Jesus, He cannot do anything but forgive your sins. His justice, His righteousness, His integrity demands it. So when times get tough, let me put it to you this way — difficult as this language may be, let me put it to you this way — what David is saying is that when times get tough, the Gospel is my security. The Gospel is my security. The righteousness of God is my security because that righteousness has been meted out on Jesus. And in Him, I am a covenant keeper. In Him I stand in a right relationship with God.

But there's a third key text here and it comes right at the very end. "For this I praise You, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to Your name. Great salvation He brings to His king, and shows steadfast love to His anointed, to David and his offspring forever." You see that little word, we'd say it's two words in English — steadfast love. You may have some other translations before you tonight but that's one of those great Old Testament Hebrew words that's just filled with meaning. It's the Hebrew word, *hesed* — God's covenant love; God's love that cannot be broken; God's word of promise that cannot be broken. It's a very special word and I want to say to you tonight that when things get tough, God is our security; when things get tough, the Gospel - that our righteousness is in Jesus - is our security; when things get tough, covenant theology is our security — God's covenant. That's what David is talking about, God's covenant love, His steadfast love, that He has shown His steadfast love to David, to His king.

And who is this David, but simply a foretaste, a foreshadowing of a greater, far greater King, King Jesus, born, as we were reading, as it happened in 2 Timothy 2 this morning, of the seed of David, of the lineage of David. God's covenant love, which saw expression before the foundation of the world when the Father and the Son covenanted together to save a people for Himself, a word that is pledged in love. "This cup," Jesus said, "this cup is the cup of the new covenant in My blood, shed for many for the remission of sins." The resurrection was the seal of it. The resurrection was the approbation of the Father of all that Jesus had accomplished as the covenant mediator. And David here is seeing himself as God's anointed king, but the blessings you understand, the blessings belong not just to David, but to his offspring, to the faithful, to everyone who believes in great David's greater Son, and forever. And forever, so that in great David's greater Son, in whom that covenant is ratified, nothing can separate us. Nothing. "Not life or death or angels or principalities or powers or things present or things to come or height or depth or anything in all of creation" because "we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." This is God's Word. This is God's covenant. This is God's steadfast love, which will never stop, which will never cease.

When things get tough, God is our security, when things get tough, the Gospel is our security, when things get tough, God's covenant, God's bond in blood is our security.

Let's pray.

Father, there are some here tonight who know all too well what it is when we say, "when things get tough," whose lives have been shaken. We pray that these words of King David three thousand years ago would speak of truths that are forever will be the source of comfort and joy. For Jesus' sake, amen.

Please stand. Receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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