

## 24. The God of our Salvation

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now, if you would please turn to our reading in 2 Samuel 22. You'll find that on page 274. Now, last week we looked at the first of four chapters at the end of this book, which in many ways sum up the story as it's developed, particularly the story of David.

This is the second of them. It's a very long chapter, so we're going to read part of it and then sing again, and then we'll go on to the second part. 2 Samuel 22, verse 1.

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.

David said, 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 wind. He made darkness around him, his canopy. Thick clouds, a gathering of water. Out of the brightness before him, coals of fire flamed forth.

[ 2 : 09 ] 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 of 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.

[ 3 : 08 ] For all his rules were before me. And from his statutes I did not turn aside. I was blameless before him. And I kept myself from guilt.

And the Lord 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 torturous.

Notice the word seem there. 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 Lord lightens my darkness.

For by you I can run against the troop. And by my God I can leap over a wall. This God, his way is perfect. The word of the Lord proves true.

[ 4 : 05 ] He 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 has made me great.

You gave me 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 they did not rise. They fell under my feet. For you equipped me with strength for the battle.

[ 5 : 04 ] 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 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 the 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, who exalted me above those who rose against me. You delivered me from men of violence.

[ 6 : 07 ] For this, I will 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. That is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to our hearts and to our minds. Now, if we could have our Bibles open, please, at page 274, and we'll have a moment of prayer.

Father, how we praise you, that you have given to us your word, and given to us your spirit, to open that word to us. And so we pray, Lord, that you will not only open your word to us, that you will open our hearts to love you.

You will open our eyes to see you, and that indeed we may be led in the way of life everlasting. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. Amen. In the college I used to teach in Durham, the college was set in a rather quaint and rather attractive little street.

[ 7 : 42 ] But it was quite a claustrophobic place because it was overshadowed by the gigantic bulk of the cathedral. And you could feel a sense of oppression, a sense of narrowness, a sense of being hemmed in, in those narrow streets.

However, if you climb to the top of the cathedral, you'd have a panoramic view of most of the north of England on a sunny day. David has been in a cramped, confined place, and God has brought him into a panoramic place, into a wide, spacious place, and that's the background of this psalm. David is speaking to the Lord on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of his enemies, the day when in verse 7, from his temple God heard my voice, and the day in verse 20, he brought me out into a broad place.

I want to say two things by way of introduction, particularly looking at verse 1. Now, another version of this, slightly different but almost identical, is Psalm 18.

It's a huge psalm. We won't have time to look at every detail, but we want to try and get the broad flow of the poem. First of all, the title of the psalm, the day the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.

[ 9 : 07 ] Now, it's important to see that this is both a specific and a general remark that David is making. This was a specific time when God rescued him from the terrible events of 1 Samuel 18 to 31, where for many years he was hounded, harried, persecuted, almost coming to death by Saul over the mountains of Judea, when he said, indeed, I will one day perish at the hands of Saul.

And Saul here, in a sense, embodies all his enemies, like Pharaoh before him and like Herod after him. Saul is the arch enemy and, of course, behind him is the great arch enemy himself, the devil. But it's also important to realize that it's not just a specific reference, there's a general reference. If it only referred to the days when he was persecuted by Saul, then surely it would have been 1 Samuel 32 and not 2 Samuel 22.

Obviously, this psalm has been put here to give us the flavor of the whole of David's life, to sum up the whole story from 1 Samuel 16 right to the end of 2 Samuel.

This is what the whole story has been about. David pours out his heart and he says, look, this is what has been happening. This is the inner meaning of these experiences. Indeed, there's more than that.

[ 10 : 39 ] The book of Samuel, 1 Samuel, begins with another great song, the song of Hannah, who praises the Lord for the birth of Samuel and sees beyond it, of course, to the birth of the greater than Samuel.

And her song, of course, is echoed in Mary's song, the magnificent part of which we sang earlier in the service. Hannah praises God, the rock, the rock of her salvation, on whom she can build her life.

David here praises God, the rock. So here we have, if you like, the bookends of 1 and 2 Samuel telling us what the story is about. That's the first thing.

Second thing is, the poem is both spontaneous and has a very clear structure. There is very deep feeling, powerful emotion, wonderful language, but it's been channeled, not like a great flood that simply overflows the whole landscape.

It's been channeled into deep and powerful channels so that we can see the flow of thought. I think that's very important. The poem is spontaneous.

[11:44] This is what David really feels. But as we'll see, the poem echoes earlier scriptures and points forward to later ones. Yet this is so often in the Psalms, actually.

And you often feel you've read it before. Or like the guy the first time he read Shakespeare said it was full of quotations. Well, so often you can feel this when you're reading the Psalms, and in a sense they are.

Because David is drawing together not just his own experience, but the experience of his people.

So let's look at the Psalm then. There are three movements in the Psalm.

I'm calling this the God of our salvation because that's what David says. Verse 3, Be the horn of my salvation. And verse 51, Great salvation he brings to his king.

This is about God the Savior. And the first thing the Psalmist says is God, he is worthy to be praised. Verses 2 to 20, I call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised.

[12:47] Now notice the power of the praise here. I don't know if you feel like me, but very often I am just made the sheer banality and flatness of the language I use.

The sheer dullness and the sheer lack of excitement and fizz in the language. If you feel that, then turn to these great words, to the Psalms.

I'm not saying you make all your prayers a string of quotations. What I'm saying is we need to turn to the prayers and to the songs of those who have deeply experienced the Lord, who have given us words to help us.

There's no harm in actually using set prayers. After all, if you think it's wrong to use set prayers that other people have written, then we must stop singing hymns that other people have written.

Of course, they've got to be our own words, but our own words coming through the medium of Scripture. So notice the power of praise. I think the power here stems from two things.

[13:51] First of all, the pictorial language that David uses. A whole rain of metaphors and images that explore the greatness of God in a variety of ways.

He is the rock, he is the shield, he is the horn of salvation, he is saved from the waves of death, and then the powerful language later on, smoke went up from his nostrils out of the brightness before him, coals of fire flamed forth.

Now once again, this is both specific and general. The language that David uses, the Lord is my rock, he says. That recalls, for example, 1 Samuel 23, verse 28, where he escaped into a rock country, the same word, from the hand of Saul.

He escaped into, if you like, into the friendly, to the friendly protection of the hills. Specific here.

Then the word fortress, used in 1 Samuel 22, of the fortress, the caves of Adullam, where he sheltered with his champions from Saul.

We'll look a bit more at that next week. And then again, the word fortress is used of Jerusalem itself in 2 Samuel 5. See, David is drawing from the deeps of his own experience.

[15:09] Nevertheless, this is not just David's experience. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be saved, and I am saved from my enemies. That is the gospel.

Any believer can say these words. And you'll notice that, once again, there's a mixture of metaphors. The Bible loves mixing metaphors to bring together different aspects of reality.

God is the rock, the solid rock on which we stand, on which we can build our lives, and indeed, build our hopes for eternity, as we sang a few moments ago.

But the word salvation is the dynamic word. Here I'm sure of the three tenses of salvation, saved in the past, being saved in the present, and to be finally saved on the last day.

There's this piling up of praise. God is the rock, but he's also the one who goes with us, and goes before us, who is around us. That's what providence means, ultimately, that God is involved in every part of our lives, our ongoing story.

[16:17] This is the piling up of praise, verses 5 to 7. This anticipates a later passage in Scripture, Jonah chapter 2, where Jonah prays almost the same words, perhaps echoing the words of this or

the words of Sam 18, and the waves of death, the dark, hostile powers that surrounded him.

You'll notice Saul's dropped out of view here. It's the waves of death and the cords of Sheol. It's darkness, death, the hostile powers.

The essence of David's prayer is that God, as he calls on the Lord, verse 7, from his temple he heard my voice.

Now, remember, the temple in Jerusalem had not been built at that point. The temple, remember, in the Old Testament often is the whole universe which the earthly temple represents.

Indeed, right at the beginning of Scripture, God builds a temple, the Garden of Eden, where he can meet with his people. And right through Scripture, Ezekiel, for example, sees the new creation in terms of the restored temple.

[17:37] That doesn't contradict Revelation, which says, I saw no temple in the city. What both are meaning is that God, in the new creation, is totally present. Totally, everything is saturated with God.

And as Solomon saw us to say in 1 Kings 18, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain you. How much less this house that I have built.

There's great pictorial language, summing up the sense of security, the sense of destiny. But the second thing is, particularly in verses 8 and following, David is reliving the story of Israel's great salvation, reliving the story of the Exodus.

very close connections with Moses' song in Exodus 15. David is showing us here how to read the Bible, isn't he?

How to read it with our imaginations, not just a dry academic exercise to thrill at its stories, to luxuriate in its poetry.

[18:48] God's actions in the past are true of him now. Now, as I've often enough said, we are not David, but we have David's God. And what God did at the Exodus wasn't an isolated example of one part of his character.

In the Exodus, God reveals himself as the Savior. God's actions in the past, David relives in the present. John Calvin says, creation is the theater of God's glory.

Now, in this passage, God, as it were, the author, the director, the manager, the constructor of the stage, the author of the play, the main character comes onto the stage.

And he, you know, this is what David is saying. It's quite astonishing. David is saying, God used the whole of creation to rescue me. Very powerful and vivid poetic dramatization of the heart of Israel's faith.

My help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. Well, if he made heaven and earth, what's to stop him taking the whole of the furniture of heaven and earth to rescue his servant?

[19:57] Just as he had rescued Moses and the people of Israel, now he rescues David. The fire, the wind, and the thunder, which echo, of course, Mount Sinai.

The word which spoke creation is speaking still. Verse 14, the Lord thunders from heaven the Most High uttered his voice, sent out arrows and scattered them, lightning, and routed them.

And the earth trembles. Prophet Habakkuk, in a similar passage in chapter 3 of his prophecy, also relives the Exodus story at the time of the Babylonian exile.

All of this is for the salvation of God's anointed king. Now, of course, we look at it in a prosy way and say David was pursued over the mountains, he was rescued from Saul, and that's that.

But that is not that. The point is, David is using the language of poetry, the language of praise, powerful, emotional, and yet clearly thought out language to show how great this God is.

[21:03] To God be the glory. David is saying great things he has done. And there's a further link with Moses. Verse 17, he is sent from on high.

He took me. He drew me out of many waters. A very deliberate echo of what the word that's used of Moses in Exodus 2. Moses is drawn out of the Nile, rescued from death, in order to carry out his part in God's kingdom.

And you'll notice verses 18 and 19, this is not a personal vendetta. He rescued me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me.

Verse 18, they confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. This is the Lord's battle. It's part of the battle with the serpent.

I've seen this so often as we've gone through these stories in Samuel, and Willie has been pointing this out regularly. We've gone through Genesis. This is part of the ongoing story. Not wrestling

against flesh and blood, but wrestling against the powers of darkness, the waves of death, the cords of Sheol, the snares of death, as David calls it here.

[ 22 : 15 ] And David is rescued and brought out into a broad place. Verse 20, the circumstances have hampered him, have crushed him, have made it unable for him to carry out his role as the anointed king.

God has brought me out into a broad place, he says, free from stifling and constricting circumstances. God is the one who is worthy to be praised, exalts David here in this glorious, wonderful poem.

It echoes right down through scripture, echoed, and it's echoed in Revelation 15, where the redeemed in heaven sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, the king of the nations, who has rescued them and brought them into the broad place, into the heaven itself.

The second thing, the second part of the poem, 21 to 31, God is the one who is ready to forgive. Not only is he worthy to be praised, but he is ready to forgive.

Now, probably, when we were reading this, we were thinking, God dealt with me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands, I have kept the ways of the Lord.

[ 23 : 34 ] We've forgotten about chapters 11 and 12, about Bathsheba and Uriah. Now, some commentators just cannot stomach this passage. Liberals want to yank it out and say it was added by someone else, some pro-David writer who wanted to try to rescue him from the taints that hung around his name.

Others say this shows that this poem must only refer to the rescue from Saul. Saul was killed on Mount Gilboa in 1 Samuel 31, the end of 1 Samuel.

As I've said already, why is this poem not there? There's a more serious point. If this poem is not true after 2 Samuel 11 and 12, how can we say that grace covers every sin?

It seems to me that this poem is deliberately placed here. We'll see this again next week at the end of 2 Samuel 23. This poem is deliberately placed here to show that grace has covered David's sin. But let's look at it. What is it? Two things. As of all, verse 21, the Lord dealt with me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands, he rewarded me.

[ 25 : 00 ] That does not mean, first of all, tit for tat. It doesn't mean the Lord said to David, because you've been righteous, I'll be righteous to you. Because you've been clean, I'll reward you.

Rather, it's saying something quite different. The Lord is saying here, because David, you have repented, because you've turned away from your sin, because you have shown no hypocrisy. I am responding to that by my grace. You see, the word blameless here, the word, verse 26, and verse 24 first, I was blameless.

Verse 26 was the blameless man. Blameless does not mean perfect. Blameless means without hypocrisy, without double standards.

Remember, the letter of James says, the double-minded or the double-hearted person is unstable in all his ways. Matthew Henry, commentator, makes a very fine comment here.

[ 26 : 03 ] Though David had sometimes weakly departed from his duty, he had never wickedly departed from his God. Isn't that so important? David's sin was great.

The consequences were great. We worked our way through 2 Samuel 13 to 21 and saw these consequences in his family. Nevertheless, we also saw that where grace, sorry, sin abounded, grace abounded even more.

There's another thing that needs to be said. If you read on in the story, the story that continues into Kings, in 1 Kings 11, verse 4, we read this of David's son.

Solomon, when he became old, his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God as the heart of David his father had been.

See, this psalm here is the psalm not just of a praising man, but of a grateful man. A man whose life has experienced grace through many dangers, toils, and snares he had already come.

[ 27 : 15 ] Grace had brought him safe thus far and grace would see him home. So, that's the first thing. And the second thing is this.

There is, this grace comes of his covenant relationship with the Lord. Verse 26, merciful, blameless, purified, and humble.

These are all covenant words. These are words that don't refer to people's natural goodness, but refer to what God makes them by his grace.

We've seen this in the past weeks with Jacob. Jacob, who became Israel, but it was a long process. I mean, the refining process goes on as it goes on with us throughout our lives. What's being said here is that as we respond to grace, grace makes us merciful, grace makes us holy.

[ 28 : 16 ] That's the point. It's not the gospel of good works at all. It's the God of the covenant. It's not that God does his bit and then leaves it to us to do our bit.

It's that the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in our lives makes us the kind of people who can write this, verse 29, you are my lamp, O Lord, and my God lightens my darkness.

Now, my darkness is not just the darkness of enemies, but the darkness in his own heart. For by you I can run against the troop of my God. I can leap over a wall.

The defense against enemies. This God. Notice this God. Not any of the godlets around. Not any of the fickle, cruel, capricious godlets from the other nations.

This God, his way is perfect. The word of the Lord proves true. He is a shield. Once again echoing an earlier scripture in Genesis, Genesis 15, the Lord said to Abraham, I am your shield and your great reward.

[ 29 : 21 ] God who is worthy to be praised. God who is ready to forgive. And finally, in verses 32 to 51, the God who will be worshipped by all the nations.

For who is God but the Lord? In other words, there is no other God. You notice the emphasis of the beginning returns. This God is my rock.

Verse 32 and then again in verse 50. That's the wrong verse, but it does appear later on in the poem.

God is the rock. You'll be worshipped by all the nations. And the emphasis now is beginning to move from David to his greater son.

Throughout the whole poem, of course, remember, the only one who could totally, fully, and without any kind of hesitation, any kind of apology, say the words of 21 to 31, was the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[ 30 : 30 ] As we come, verse 50, for this I will praise you among the nations and sing praises to your name. Now there are two things to notice. First of all, the exploits that God did through David.

Verses 32 to 43. Verse 35, he trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. Now once again, you could read this simply, this is an Iron Age warlord, a warmonger, a great champion, there's nothing here but blood, thunder, militarism, but that's not the point.

The point is God is bringing his kingdom. Notice verse 36, you have given me the shield of your salvation. And this wonderful phrase, your gentleness has made me great.

At the very heart of God's kingdom. It's not simply the crushing of a bully by an even greater bully. It's the overthrow of evil by someone who is not only more powerful but someone who is holy.

[ 31 : 38 ] Because ultimately evil is self-destructive. Ultimately evil regimes, evil people, they perish and very often they destroy themselves and each other.

Your gentleness has made me great. So all these stories from 1 Samuel 16 onwards, they are not just the exploits of an Iron Age warlord, they are God bringing in his kingdom.

You'll notice, he made my feet, verse 34, he trains my hands. Notice the switching between he and you. And then verse 38, I pursued, I consumed, verse 40, for you equipped me.

This is not David bragging about his exploits, this is David boasting about his God. I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom.

I will boast in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. That's what's happening here. If you read the accounts of other warlords, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, boasts and brags about the nations he overthrew.

[ 32 : 46 ] Go to the British Museum and to the Assyrian rooms and you see evidence of that. He mentions the gods but they're in a subordinate place. Funny of course that in all Sennacherib's inscriptions he never mentions the events of 2 Kings 19 when he failed to take the city of Jerusalem because the greater God was at work.

This is not like the bragging of an ancient eastern warlord. This is the boasting of a man who like Paul boasts in the one who has made him great.

So there's the exploits of God through David and then there is the gospel for the nations verses 44 to 51 all nations will serve the greater son.

A king on high is reigning whom endless ages bless as we sang and this theme is going to continue into chapter 23 as we'll sing in a moment to praise the Lord Lord.

Let the earth hear his voice. All nations will come and worship him. Now in the actual reign of David, this is foreshadowed because as we've seen David's kingdom extended from the Nile in the south to Euphrates in the north.

[ 34 : 02 ] And that was promised to Abraham that his descendants would reign from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates. But it's much more than that.

Read the letters of the Romans chapter 15 verse 12 where quoting from Isaiah Paul says the root of Jesse will arise to rule the nations.

How is the root of Jesse, David's greater son, ruling the nations even now? Surely he's ruling the nations as people from every nation, from every language, from every culture, come and give their lives to him, anticipating that day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess.

It's fascinating to see how Paul uses these stories of David, uses the imagery of the Old Testament to show how this prophecy of David's endless reign, how the prophecy of the, verse 50, praising among the nations will actually come true.

This is a psalm with great thoughts about God, isn't it? And that's why it's so important we saturate ourselves in such kind of language and such kind of thought, that we have big horizons, that our horizons are as big as those of Scripture themselves.

[ 35 : 28 ] Because this is a God who didn't simply carry out his purpose in the Iron Age between the Nile and the Euphrates. This is a God who is gathering people from every nation and language.

We know what the end of the story will be. I saw a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne of God and of the Lamb and praising him for his great salvation.

Great salvation he brings to his king. And then the very end of the poem, the great covenant word, steadfast love to his anointed, to David, and his offspring forever.

This is an eternal gospel. This is a gospel for the nations. Amen. Let's pray. O Lord, enlarge our scanty thought to tell the wonders you have wrought.

Unloose our stammering tongues to tell your love immense, unsearchable. Father, we praise you for this great poem. This poem written long ago and yet coming to us with the gospel, the gospel of saving grace, the gospel of forgiveness, the gospel that is for the nations.

[ 36 : 53 ] May this encourage us, may this challenge us, and may you be richly blessed through it. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.