

He deserves praise

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let me welcome you to our Lunchtime Bible Talk today. We're starting a short series on one of David's great Psalms, Psalm 18, which will run for three weeks.

Now, I say three weeks because two weeks today we won't have a Bible talk because we have the Minister's Conference then and all the rooms are needed. That's on the 18th. I'll announce that again next week.

So, meet today, next week, and then the last Wednesday of June. As I say, we're starting a new little series on Psalm 18.

So, if you would turn, please, to page 454 and we'll read the first 19 verses of this psalm. To the choir master, a Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord, who addressed the words of this song to the Lord on the day when the Lord rescued him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.

He said, The cords of Sheol entangled me.

[1 : 3 4] The snares of death confronted me. In my distress, I called upon the Lord. To my God, I cried for help. From his temple, he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears.

Then the earth wheeled and rocked. The foundations also of the mountains 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 came swiftly on the wings of the wind. He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him. Thick clouds, dark with water. Out of the brightness before him, Hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.

The Lord also thundered in the heavens, And the Most High uttered his voice, Hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out his arrows and scattered them.

[2 : 4 3] He flashed forth lightnings and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, And the foundations of the world were laid bare. At your rebuke, O Lord, At the blast of the breath of your nostrils.

He sent from on high. He took me. He drew me out of many waters. He rescued me from my strong enemy And 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.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Let's have a moment or two of prayer. Our God's strength, fortress and deliverer, The rock of our refuge, Our shield and the horn of our salvation.

Lord, who deserves praise. Father, we thank you for these moments When we can step aside from the busyness of our lives, From the good things and the bad things, From the many other activities That take up our time.

[3 : 56] And open our hearts and our minds To listen to what you have to say to us. We thank you for this psalm, For your servant David, Who was inspired to write the words of this psalm.

Not just about himself or for himself, But for all who have come after him In the life of faith. And so we pray, Lord, That you will open these words to us this afternoon, And that you will bless us greatly, As we hear what the Spirit is saying to us Through these verses.

And we ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. We're all familiar, aren't we, With the type of person Who loves talking about themselves.

Indeed, if we're honest, If we look in the mirror every day, We can see one of such people. You know the definition of a bore, Someone who talks about themselves, And you want to talk about yourself.

But on the whole, It's not something we admire, is it? We don't find it congenial When people talk about themselves, When people draw attention to their strengths, To their achievements, And expect to be praised for them.

[5 : 09] I say partly, of course, Our own fallenness, We want the praise to come in our direction. So why is it, That the Lord God, So often in Scripture, Calls upon us to praise him?

Why is it in the book of Psalms, So many of the Psalms, Begin and continue, With the praise of God. Why is this something, That we admire, That we praise in the Lord, But don't admire in human beings?

I think there's, There's a very straightforward reason for that. Human beings, Including ourselves, Are fallen and fallible. The good things we do, The good thoughts we think, They're all tinted with fallenness, And sinfulness.

But the Lord himself, There are no faults in him. There are no weaknesses, There is no sin in him. God is light, And in him is no darkness at all.

And when God calls us to praise him, It's not just for his own sake, It's for our sake. Because only in praising him, Can we be truly human?

[6 : 21] Because praising the Lord, Draws us out of our own concerns, Draws us away from our little world, Opens our eyes, To see the wonder of God, Who he is, And what he has done.

Particularly in the Psalms, But not just in the Psalms, There are models, Of how to praise God. In this little series, I'm calling, The God of our salvation, Which of course, Is more or less, A direct quotation, From the Psalm itself.

And today, Our subject is, The God of our salvation, Deserves to be praised. That's what these verses we've read, Is about. The power of praise, The power of praising God.

Just a word or two of background. Now, the title is very important. Indeed, the title is part of the Psalm, To the choir master, A Psalm of David, The servant of the Lord.

And it's important to see, That this situation, Is both a specific one, And a general one. It's both specific to David, Delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, And from the hand of Saul.

[7 : 30] Saul, who is the enemy, Par exalong, so to speak. The one, if you read in 1 Samuel, The second part of 1 Samuel, Saul continually harassed, And persecuted David, Tried to have him killed, Tried to use every means possible, To prevent David coming to the throne.

But there's also many other enemies. Now, see this particularly next week. One of the puzzles about this Psalm, Is in fact, if you glance for a moment, Verse 20, The Lord dealt with me, According to my righteousness.

Verse 21, I have kept the ways of the Lord, Not wickedly departed from my God. Had David forgotten, About 2 Samuel 11 and 12, Because this Psalm also appears, By the way, In 2 Samuel, At the end of the book, In 2 Samuel 22, In 2 Samuel 11 and 12, The much earlier stage in the book, David had had Uriah killed, And committed adultery, With his wife Bathsheba.

Had David forgotten about that? Now, some people want to say, Basically, He's only thinking, He's thinking about the time before that. That doesn't make any sense.

If you'd been thinking about the time before that, This would have occurred at the end of 1 Samuel, When Saul died. But no, It's placed both here, And at the end of 2 Samuel, As a kind of summing up, Of the life of David.

[9 : 00] Indeed, The whole story of David, And indeed, And indeed, The whole story of the books of Samuel. And here now, Among the Psalms, Among the Psalms of David, It's telling us that God deserves to be praised.

It's spontaneous, A very deep feeling, A very deep emotion. David felt this. But he's also constructed it very carefully. He's channeled, if you like. Poem is a great prayer, And a great, An enthusiastic sound, To the Lord, The God of his salvation.

I want to make two points about it. One about, if you like, The style, And the other about the content. So first of all, The language of praise, In this psalm.

David explores, The greatness of God, In a whole variety of pictures, Which refer specifically, To his own life, But also say things about God, Which remain true, And which are continually, Part of our praise.

You notice verse 2, The Lord is a rock, And a fortress. This, And, The rock here, May refer to, One of the places that he hid, When he was being pursued by Saul.

[10 : 20] Similarly, The fortress, That's sometimes used of Jerusalem itself, Sometimes used of the cave of Adullam, Where David hid. So, God is the rock.

God, God, God, We can, In other words, We can build our lives on God. And that's what, What the word rock, The word fortress means. We can build our lives on him. We are safe, When we are living in him.

And, The piling up of praise, In verses 5 to 7, The cores of shale, The snares of death, I called upon the Lord, To the Lord, I cried for help.

These verses, These words are to be echoed by Jonah, In chapter 2 of his book, When he prays from the most bizarre place anyone has ever prayed from, From the belly of the fish.

And he echoes those words of David. And, David is saying, Basically, Wherever I have been, Whatever experience I've gone through, God is worthy to be praised.

[11 : 24] From his temple, He heard my voice. Now, If you know your Bible, You're probably saying the temple wasn't built, When David wrote this psalm. And David, Indeed, Wasn't the one to build the temple.

The point here is, The temple is not the building on earth. It's the whole universe. The whole universe, Which is God's temple. So, You see what David is saying?

We can build our lives on God. He is a rock. We can live in God. He is a fortress. And also, There is no place in this universe, Where he will not hear us.

Nice to say this in a much later psalm, Psalm 139, Where can I flee from your spirit? If I go up to the heavens, You are there. Down to Sheol, You are there. If I go to the furthest recesses of the universe, Even there, Your spirit will lead me.

So, Why is God worthy to be praised? He is worthy to be praised, Because of who he is. He fills heaven and earth. He is worthy to be praised, Because that great God is one, On whom we can build our lives securely.

[12 : 32] That's, If you like, Something about the style. I want to say something now, About the content. Particularly verses 8, And following, Smoke went up from his nostrils.

What David is doing here now, Is he is reliving the very heart, Of Israel's faith, Of Israel's history. He's echoing the song, That Moses himself sang, Back in Exodus 15.

This is one reason, Why it's so important actually, To look at Bible history, Because Bible history, Is not just a record, Of the ancient past.

Bible history is not just, Something that God did, Bible history reveals, Who God is, And the kind of God that he is. That's why, We mustn't read the Bible, In a kind of detached manner.

We must, Thrill as we read stories, Luxuriate in his poetry, Enter the experiences, Of those who are the writers. God's actions, In the past, Are true of him now.

[13 : 36] It's very interesting, How so often, The psalmist, When they're in a situation, Of deep trouble, Called to the God, Of the Exodus, Who rescued his people.

They're not, And David is essentially, David is essentially, Talking about the God, Who harnesses the whole of nature, To help his servant. You see, In many ways, You could say, Verse 7 and 8, The earth reeled and rocked, The foundations of the mountains, Tremled, Quaked, Because he was angry, Smoke went up from his nostrils.

He would very well say, Where on earth did that happen, In the story of David? Well, In one sense, It didn't. But what he's doing, Is here, Saul drops out of the picture.

His own particular circumstance, Even drops out of the picture. He's saying, This is a God, We can trust in, Because he will harness, The whole of nature, If you like, To come to the help, Of his servant.

Just as he had rescued Moses, Using all his power, All his greatness, All his might, As creator. That's the kind of God, He is praying to.

[14 : 45] Calvin said, Creation is the theater, Of God's glory. And David is saying, Look at that particular drama, If you like, The drama when God, Took his people, Across the sea, Led them to the desert, Brought them to the promised land, And see, The kind of God he is.

Just as he had rescued Moses, He can rescue David, And he can rescue us. Now, We know, That we mustn't be naive here. Many people find themselves, In circumstances, Which can be described, In verse 5, The cords of Sheol, The snares of death.

And we pray, And we pray, And we pray, And nothing seems to happen. The point that's being made here, Is that God, Is the same God, That he will care for his people, That he will save his people, And that he is not, He is not indifferent.

And that's why, When we think of God, We must think of him, In the language of praise, The language of worship, Not just the language of theories. At the very heart of Israel's faith, Is the word of another psalm, My help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.

Now, If our help is in the name of the Lord, Who made heaven and earth, That means there is absolutely nothing, In heaven and earth, Which he cannot surmount, From which he cannot rescue us, And from which he will not, Eventually deliver us.

[16 : 18] Remember, Paul echoes that in Romans 8, Nothing in all creation. And he takes it a bit further, Neither life nor death, Even beyond death, The creator still holds us in his hand.

So the fire, The wind, And the thunder here, Smoke went up, Devouring fire, Bowed the heavens, And came down, Came swiftly on the wings of the wind. That's telling us another important truth about God.

God the rock, Or the fortress, He is solid, He is dependable, We build our lives on him. God the fire and the wind, He is dynamic, Carrying out his purpose, Continuing his, Continuing his plans, Always looking to the future.

It's interesting, Actually, When the Bible writers talk about God, They use these mixed images about him. Images suggesting solidity, Images suggesting movement. And of course, We need both.

If you have too much solidity, Too much, Too much unchangingness, Then you simply get stuck in ruts. If you have too much movement, Then you simply become like a butterfly, Rootless, Nowhere to settle.

[17 : 29] Whereas, Building our lives on God, Means not only are we secure, But he will continue to fulfill his purposes for us. Both of these come out here.

But verse 14, He sent out his arrows, Scattered them, Then the channels of the sea were seen. At your rebuke, O Lord. This isn't mindless noise.

This is God speaking. God rebuking his enemies. This is the very heart of the praise of God, Isn't it? That God deserves to be praised, Because of his grace, But also because of his judgment.

Very interesting, Actually, When you read the Psalms, You find that God's judgment, Is a subject of praise. Psalm 98, For example, One of those glorious passages, Where the whole of creation is moved, The trees clap their hands, The rivers rejoice, The seas roar, Before the Lord, Because he comes, He comes to judge the earth.

That is why the rejoicing of creation, Because when he comes to judge the earth, When he comes to set up his kingdom, The curse and the fallenness, Which now marks it, Will be gone.

[18 : 43] So, That's why, We have the echoes, Of the thunders of Sinai, And the earth trembling. Now, As I say, In one sense, This didn't happen to David.

Verse 16, He sent me from on high, He took me, He drew me out of many waters. But, David is using deliberately, The language of the Exodus, Because the many waters, The deep waters, Are often used in the Bible, As a symbol of the powers of darkness, A symbol of the enemies of God, The persistent vendetta, Of the enemies of God, Part of the, That's the very heart, Of the Bible story.

He brought me out into a broad place. Now, A broad place, Free from stifling, And constricting circumstances, Free from the things, That weighed him down, Free from the things, That made him, That made him afraid.

So, He rescued me, Verse 19, Because he delighted in me. Let's take both of these, For a moment, He rescued me, He saved me.

David didn't deserve, To be saved, Any more than we deserve, To be saved. This is pure grace. He rescued me. But not only did he, He delighted in me. In other words, He called me, Into a loving relationship, With himself.

[20 : 09] And that's what God still does. That's why I say, To coin a phrase, We are not David, But we have David's God. David, In effect, Is saying here, Lord, I'm not Moses, But I have Moses God.

And you see how this works, All the way, All the way through God's dealings, With his people. He is totally consistent. He is the God of our salvation.

The God who deserves, To be praised. Praising, And praising of course, Is at the very heart, Of a lot of human life. After all, If you love someone, You talk about them, Don't you?

You praise them. If you enjoy going to a particular place, You talk about it. You advise people to go there, And so on. Therefore, The praise of God, Is at the very, Very heart of our faith.

The praise of God, In many senses, Is what our faith is about. Because praise, As I say, Takes us out of ourself, And plunges us, Into the heart of God.

[21 : 14] But yet at the same time, Praise also helps us, In our present circumstances. That's the first thing we learn, From this psalm.

Our God, Deserves to be praised. Next week, We'll see how that God, Who deserves to be praised, Is also the God, Who is ready to forgive.

Where he gives other reasons, For praising. Let's pray. Praise the Lord, For he is good. For his mercy endures forever. Father, We pray that our lives, As well as our lips, May praise you.

That our hearts, May rejoice in you. That we may, Look, Not into the difficulties, Of our circumstances first, But into the greatness, Of your salvation.

We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.