

David's Rock Song

Psalm 18

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We've mentioned the power of music to profoundly affect your mood. Some people have playlists curated for different activities in life. You may have songs that will give you a good cry, or a playlist of guilty pleasure songs, or one of road trip songs for when you want to sing along. Sometimes people are surprised when I can sing along with a lot of Metallica and AC/DC songs, but those songs were always on in the weight room in high school to get you pumped up. To this day, hearing "Thunderstruck" on a football field gets my blood pumping!

I have titled Psalm 18 David's Rock Song, because in some ways, I think it reads like a typical rock and roll song. It is designed to get you pumped and excited. But the bigger reason is because it's about the Rock of David's life, the Lord. David recites the great characteristics of God and all the ways he has seen the Lord move in his life. It is intended to get us pumped up; but not about David or ourselves, it's getting us pumped up about the Lord.

Background

Psalm 18 has several elements that make it stand apart from some of the others in the book of Psalms. First is its length. While Psalm 119 is famously the longest of the psalms (by a large margin), Psalm 18 is one of the longer songs in the book.

Second is that it has an introduction, and it's a fairly lengthy introduction. This is what the introduction says,

For the choir director: A psalm of David, the servant of the Lord. He sang this song to the Lord on the day the Lord rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul. He sang: (NLT)

Not every psalm has an introduction that gives us background or the author. This is one of the few that does. Unlike the headings you see in most bibles that break up sections, this is actually part of the scriptural text. So, all bibles contain this introduction.

The introduction tells us that David sang this song to the Lord after God had rescued him from all his enemies. That leads us to the third thing that is unique about it: it is quoted almost verbatim in 2 Samuel 22.

1 and 2 Samuel record the events of David's life. God took David, a mere shepherd boy, and anointed him the next king of Israel, but he lived under the rule of the current king, Saul, for many years. Saul tried to kill him but never succeeded. Eventually, David became the rightful king and was the greatest king Israel ever had (until Jesus). 2 Samuel 22 places this psalm at the end of David's life, which leads us to think it may not be about any singular event, but rather is David's reflection on his life and seeing the Lord's faithfulness in it.

The final thing that makes Psalm 18 unique is that it has messianic overtones. We'll examine this more as we get into the text, but several places in this psalm seem like they apply more to Jesus than to David. Many of David's psalms are prophetic and this may be one of them. Psalm 18 is quoted twice in the New Testament, and both times it is quoted in reference to Jesus.

Overarching Theme

With that background in mind, we can begin to examine the text itself. The first three verses give us an introduction to what is to come.

¹ I love you, Lord; you are my strength. ² The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety. ³ I called on the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and he saved me from my enemies. (Psalm 18:1-3, NLT)

These opening verses show us this is a psalm of praise, where David lists all the reasons he had to praise the Lord. In the first three verses he uses several images to depict the Lord's presence in his life. Each of them points to God's provision, His power, and His love for David.

David was looking back on his life and was humbled by all the ways he had seen the Lord's hand guiding him and providing for him. Many people miss this lesson. We often hear people complain about how God is silent, He isn't moving, or He isn't answering prayer. But I would contend that part of the reason people don't see the Lord move is because they aren't looking for it!

Even believers can be guilty of this. We pray for healing, but when healing comes, we celebrate the wisdom of our doctors, not the provision of the Lord. We ask the Lord to provide a job, then give the credit to our stellar resume or our connections. We ask for safety for travel, but don't give God credit when we arrive safely. We pray for the Lord to change someone's heart but give credit for it to someone other than God.

The point is that we often fail to give God credit for the things He does! David didn't do that. He often took time to praise God for His answers to prayer. So, how do we become more like David in that regard? Look for ways the Lord is moving!

On the mission trips we take with students, they encourage everyone to look for God sightings. These are ways we saw the Lord moving, times when we saw the evidence and provision of God. Each night, we would share the God sightings from the day. We can cultivate this habit in our own lives. Take some time each day or each week and ask, how have I seen the Lord move? If you start looking for it, you'll more readily see it.

God's Deliverance

David gives examples of God's deliverance in verses 4-6.

⁴ The ropes of death entangled me; floods of destruction swept over me. ⁵ The grave wrapped its ropes around me; death laid a trap in my path. ⁶ But in my

distress I cried out to the Lord; yes, I prayed to my God for help. He heard me from his sanctuary; my cry to him reached his ears. (Psalm 18:4-6, NLT)

These descriptions may be an amalgamation of everything David had faced throughout his life. He had often been face-to-face with death.

In his early years as a shepherd, he had to defend his sheep from lions and wolves. He fought the giant Goliath and was victorious. When he served as Saul's advisor, Saul tried to kill him by throwing a spear at him (twice!), and then he spent years on the run from Saul. Once David became king, his son Absalom attempted to overthrow him and David had to run for his life again. He was a mighty warrior, so he had faced his own mortality repeatedly in battle, and just before this psalm appears in 2 Samuel 22, David had been cornered, inches from death, when a member of his army showed up at just the right time and rescued him.

As David looked back on his life, he consistently saw the Lord's hand protecting him. David didn't try to take credit for this; he recognized the only reason he had been successful and protected was because of the hand of God.

You may not have faced death as often as David, but I suspect if you look through your own life, you can see many times when the Lord protected you as well. Maybe it's a delay that kept you from getting in an accident, a circumstance that prevented you from making a bad decision, or the Lord protecting you when evil people tried to harm you. Like David, we can each see God's hand of protection and deliverance in our lives.

God's Power

In the next section of the psalm, David shifts from his own experience to describing the greatness of God. Verses 12-15 are good examples of this.

¹² Thick clouds shielded the brightness around him and rained down hail and burning coals. ¹³ The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded amid the hail and burning coals. ¹⁴ He shot his arrows and scattered his enemies; great bolts of lightning flashed, and they were confused. ¹⁵ Then at your command, O Lord, at the blast of your breath, the bottom of the sea could be seen, and the foundations of the earth were laid bare. (Psalm 18:12-15, NLT)

David is probably not referring to his own experiences, but reflecting on the ways God had revealed His power. On Mt. Sinai, while Moses met with the Lord, there were earthquakes, dark clouds, and thunder and lightning. The people were terrified, recognizing the great power of God.

When Moses led the people through the Red Sea, they walked through on dry ground with walls of water on each side. After they crossed through safely, and Pharaoh's army pursued them into the middle of the sea, the Lord caused the waters to go back, completely overwhelming them and destroying them.

God continually revealed Himself to the Israelites in either a cloud or in a fire. Both were intended to remind them that they could not approach the Lord. They were a reminder that He is holy, He is powerful, and He alone is the One worthy of worship. David recalled these events to remind himself of the power of His Lord.

Remember that the God of Abraham and Moses and David is the same God we serve today! We can and should praise Him as we recognize His power. When we see God's power correctly and fully, it should lead us to a place of praise, but also to a place of humble worship. We remember that the Lord is not to be trifled with, and we should submit to Him in all things.

God's Justice

The next section raises some questions that are difficult to answer.

²⁰ The Lord rewarded me for doing right; he restored me because of my innocence. ²¹ For I have kept the ways of the Lord; I have not turned from my God to follow evil. ²² I have followed all his regulations; I have never abandoned his decrees. ²³ I am blameless before God; I have kept myself from sin. ²⁴ The Lord rewarded me for doing right. He has seen my innocence. ²⁵ To the faithful you show yourself faithful; to those with integrity you show integrity. ²⁶ To the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. ²⁷ You rescue the humble, but you humiliate the proud. (Psalm 18:20-26, NLT)

David says that the Lord provided deliverance because he had done what was right. At first glance, it appears that David was calling himself perfect, and that's why he had been successful—because the Lord loved him because of his sinlessness.

We know David sinned in several cases, most notably when he had an affair with Bathsheba and then had her husband killed to cover it up. That certainly doesn't sound like someone who has followed all of God's regulations and has kept himself from sin. We also know that in Psalm 14, David said that no one is righteous, not even one. So, what are we to make of David's statements in these verses?

One possibility is that David was speaking prophetically here, because though these descriptions may not be accurate for David, they were certainly accurate for Jesus. But I also think David is making a general statement about the pattern of his life. He had sought to live for the Lord consistently, and that led to the Lord's blessing in his life.

In verses 25 and 26, he says that the Lord tends to deal with people the way they deal with him. Those who are faithful tend to see the Lord's faithfulness in return. Those who try to be sneaky and crafty find that the Lord is even sneakier and craftier, and He will not be mocked. Those who are proud will be humbled by God.

David saw this in his own life. He paid dearly for his sin with Bathsheba. Each time David failed, the Lord's hand came against him. But his continued faithfulness also resulted in continued blessing from God. This is general truism: when we stand with the Lord, we open ourselves up to His blessings. When we stand in opposition to Him, we

invite His correction. While the Lord's response isn't always immediate, this is his typical pattern. We would be wise to take that into account when we decide how to act.

God's Strength

In verses 33-36, David uses some superhuman imagery to describe the way the Lord empowers His people.

³³ He makes me as surefooted as a deer, enabling me to stand on mountain heights. ³⁴ He trains my hands for battle; he strengthens my arm to draw a bronze bow. ³⁵ You have given me your shield of victory. Your right hand supports me; your help has made me great. ³⁶ You have made a wide path for my feet to keep them from slipping. (Psalm 18:32-36, NLT)

David describes himself as having supernatural power and strength. But he doesn't take credit for it. He gives credit to the Lord.

Those who stand with the Lord do have supernatural power at our disposal. Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 6, when he reminds us that the battles we face are not about flesh and blood, but are spiritual. He goes on to remind us that we find supernatural strength when we rely on the Lord in all we do.

When we face battles in our lives, whatever those may be, we must choose whether we will fight with our weapons and strength or whether we will fight with the Lord's. If we want to have the kind of superhuman power David had, we cannot resort to the tactics of the world—we must follow the Lord's commands and trust Him for the victory.

The Messiah

Verses 37-48 mirror the beginning of the psalm. This was David's poetic way of reminding us that God had delivered him repeatedly and shown His great power. He was once again lifting his eyes to the character of his God. But he shifts gears at the very end.

⁴⁹ For this, O Lord, I will praise you among the nations; I will sing praises to your name. ⁵⁰ You give great victories to your king; you show unfailing love to your anointed, to David and all his descendants forever. (Psalm 18:49-50, NLT)

In these concluding verses, David is led to praise God for the promises he knows the Lord will fulfill in the future! The New Testament writers recognized that David was speaking prophetically in these verses, stating that the Messiah would be victorious, and that all nations, not just Israel, would come to praise Him.

God had promised David that his offspring would rule forever. But in just a few hundred years, the kingdom David had ruled would fall and become subject to a revolving door of outside oppressors. But the promise to David was not about an earthly kingdom, but a far greater one. Jesus was the offspring God had promised. Jesus did not merely rule the kingdom of Israel; He rules the Kingdom of God. He is supreme over all nations.

David was confident that the Lord would keep His promises, because he had seen God's faithfulness throughout history and throughout his own life. The more we remember the Lord's faithfulness and power, the more readily and fully we will trust Him.

Conclusion

This Psalm has many principles we can learn. Let me draw just a few applications I think we should learn from this passage.

First, we should be intentional about remembering God's faithfulness. The more evidence we have of God keeping His promises, being active in our world, and working in our lives, the more readily we will trust Him and be willing to follow Him. So, be intentional about recalling the ways you have seen God move. Sit down with a sheet of paper and start trying to think back in your life about all the ways you have seen the Lord working. Think of prayers you have seen Him answer. Write them down in a list and keep adding to it as time goes on. Such a list can help you to trust in the times when you don't see the Lord moving. In my office, I keep a file of notes that remind me that the Lord has used me for His purposes. I call it my "rainy day" file. When we have a list of God's faithfulness, it helps us to trust Him on the rainy days of life. It reminds you that He is faithful. So be intentional about remembering God's faithfulness for the inevitable rainy days you'll encounter.

Second, we see a pattern for worship music. Remember, Psalm 18 was a song! Much of the worship music we see today tends to be much more focused on the worshiper than the One we are supposed to worship. One thing we see consistently in the psalms (and especially in Psalm 18) is that the focus of our praise should be the Lord. True worship leads to genuine submission. It magnifies the character of God rather than trying to make Him more like us. We should sing (and listen to) music that elevates our view of the Lord and draws us to a closer walk with Him.

Finally, we are reminded that if we build our lives on the Rock, we cannot be shaken. Jesus used the same analogy as David. He talked about those who build their lives on foundations made of sand vs. those who build on the Rock. When our lives are anchored to the Lord, we can weather any storm that comes. Those who build their lives on other foundations will find they crumble when hard times come. What is your foundation? Where do you look for strength? What gives you confidence in hard times? What is your primary focus? If your answer is anything other than Christ, you will find yourself shaken when the storms come. But if we build our lives on Christ, we can be confident that no enemy, no scheme, and nothing in all of creation can stand against us, because our Rock stands firm.

David's Rock song reflects on the greatness of the Rock on which he had built his life. I would encourage you to do the same. You may not write a song, but I hope you will recount His faithfulness and seek Him fully. Then you too will see that He will lead you, strengthen you, and carry you through whatever this life may bring.

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