

I have already preached on Psalm 143 –
 back in my misguided youth,
 when I believed that one should randomly preach Psalms according to genre!!

Psalm 143 is a cry for mercy –
 a plea for God to *answer me in your righteousness*.

Not based on *my righteousness* – “for no one living is righteous before you.”
 But so that you may be just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus.

In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!
 My hope is not that *I* am so righteous!
 My hope is that *you* are so righteous –
 and you will do all that you have promised,
 because I am your servant.

And that final point serves as the connection for this whole series of Psalms (138-145)
 which are all “Psalms of David.”

1. Praying with Clarity – Seeing through the Eyes of David (v1-8)

Of David.

When you pray, there are three things necessary to keep in mind.
 Who is God?
 Who am I?
 What is my situation?

That’s why I suggest that praying with clarity means learning to see through the eyes of David.
 Psalm 144 is “Of David” –
 reminding us to think of the first person singular voice as the voice of David.

Which means that when I sing Psalm 144,
 I am singing this song *with David* – and especially, *with Jesus*.

Psalm 144 has a lot of parallels with Psalm 18 –
 lots of phrases are drawn from David’s song of praise there.
 We can be confident that David actually sang Psalm 18,
 because 2 Samuel 22 quotes Psalm 18 at length –
 saying that David spoke this song to the LORD.

The Septuagint – a Greek translation of the OT – adds another line to the heading:

“concerning Goliath.”

I suspect that in the Septuagint translator was trying to help his readers think about how to connect this song to the life of David.

And indeed – there are many themes in Psalm 144 that connect well to the story of Goliath!

The combination of the battle and war theme
with the idea of rescuing David from the cruel sword
(Goliath had a mighty sword) –
and the hand of foreigners;
and the reference to the ten-stringed harp,
which David had used to calm Saul’s evil spirit,
even before the time that Goliath challenged Israel.

But even the story of David and Goliath reminds us of the central point of the gospel:

You cannot defeat Goliath.

What is the Goliath in your life?

What is that big, nasty, brutish enemy that continues to harass and attack you?

You are not able to defeat Goliath!

What would have happened if *any* Israelite (besides David)
went out against Goliath?

Goliath would have stomped him like a bug!!

King Saul was head and shoulders taller than all the other Israelites.

But did Saul – the king – the one who was supposed to go out before his troops –

Did Saul dare to accept Goliath’s challenge?

Of course not!

Saul may have had his problems –

but sheer stupidity was not one of them!

He knew that the Spirit of the Lord had left him –

and so he knew that he had *no chance* to defeat Goliath!

All the faith in the world couldn’t defeat Goliath?!!!

What would have happened if some young, pious man

had stepped forward with faith in his heart –

trusting that God would deliver Goliath into his hands...!!!

Goliath would have stomped on him like a bug!!

You see, it’s not good enough to have “*faith*” in general

when you go up against your enemies!!

To defeat Goliath, you need to be the LORD’s anointed!

To defeat Goliath – you need to be the Messiah!!

And so our song tonight is the War Song of the Messiah –
the War Song of the Prince of Peace!

And as we learn to pray with clarity,
let's start with who is God?

a. Who Is God? My Fortress, My Trainer, and My Deliverer (v1-2)

*144 Blessed be the LORD, my rock,
who trains my hands for war,
and my fingers for battle;
2 he is my steadfast love and my fortress,
my stronghold and my deliverer,
my shield and he in whom I take refuge,
who subdues peoples^[a] under me.*

Notice the two parts of who God is.

He is my rock – my steadfast love (my *hesed* – the one who is faithful to his covenant);
my fortress, my stronghold, and my deliverer,
my shield and he in whom I take refuge.

In other words, there is a whole lot of emphasis here on how *God protects me!!*

But also, the LORD “trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle...
He subdues peoples under me.”

God had prepared David for that day to go up against Goliath.

David was a shepherd –
and he had to protect the sheep from bears and lions.
David was skilled in the use of the sling.

In the same way, our Lord Jesus was prepared for battle through what he suffered.

In the temptation in the wilderness –
in his years of ministry –
he learned obedience through what he suffered,
so that he might go before us and defeat the greater Goliath on the cross!

And so we sing this song in Jesus.

We sing this song because Jesus is our fortress – our rock – and our deliverer.
And he now trains our hands for war – our fingers for battle.
And no, our battle is not with flesh and blood –
our fight is with principalities and powers –
with the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places.

But we fight against a defeated foe.

Think about the story of David and Goliath.

When did Israel join David in the fight against the Philistines?

After Goliath was dead on the ground with his head cut off!

Once the Seed of the Woman had crushed the head of the serpent –
then the people of God joined in the fight!

We don't have to fight Goliath –
but we do have to join in the mop-up effort after the victory is won!

When our Spirit-anointed Messiah was raised up from the dead in triumph –
then we gave the victory shout and we are trained – we are disciplined –
in the way of our victorious Savior –
and we go forth to the battle to fight like him!!!

How did he fight?

He died.

How does he train us to fight?

Just like him!

Die like a champion!

“that I may know Christ – and the power of his resurrection,
and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,
that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”
(Phil 3:10-11)

Because the cross is the only way to glory!

And that is where verses 3-4 are heading:

b. Who Am I? Vapor (v3-4)

³ *O LORD, what is man that you regard him,
or the son of man that you think of him?*

⁴ *Man is like a breath;
his days are like a passing shadow.*

Last time we saw that Psalm 142 is connected with the book of Job with its theme of *complaint*.
Tonight we see that Psalm 144 is connected with Ecclesiastes in the use of *vapor*.

The word translated “breath” is the Hebrew word *hebel*.

It is the opening word in the book of Ecclesiastes:

“hebel, hebel, everything is hebel.”

And Hebel is also the name of Adam and Eve’s son.
It usually is pronounced “Abel” in Genesis –
but in Hebrew, the word is the same: *Hebel*.

Verse four reads in Hebrew: “Adam l’hebel.”
Adam is as Abel.

All of humanity is like a breath – here today and gone tomorrow.
His days are like a passing shadow.
There is no future for man.

Only a fleeting present.
And so David asks,
“O LORD, *what is man* that you regard him?
The son of man that you think of him.”

This is drawn from Psalm 8 –
where David reflects on God’s care for humanity
not nearly so focused on himself.
There are also echoes of Psalm 89 –
where the Psalmist laments the destruction of the house of David.

Why does God take heed to man?
Why does God take note of the *Adam* who has become *Hebel*.
The man who has become vapor –
a passing breath –
a passing shadow...

There is a way in which Psalm 144 does not really answer the question
“what is man that you regard him?”
But then again, the point is *not* that there is something *in man* that God should take note of him!
Psalm 144 agrees with Ecclesiastes that the end of *man* is futility.

Left to myself, I will simply die.
I don’t care how good you are.
I don’t care how bad you are.
Someday, you’re just going to die!
You can’t escape it.
You can try to ignore it – but in the end *death wins*.

There is nothing in man that makes man so wonderful.
Rather, the point is that God himself has promised.

God made a covenant with David – and therefore if he truly be a God of *steadfast love* –
a God who shows covenant loyalty and faithfulness –
then he must fulfil his oath!

And the Davidic voice in Psalm 144 –
the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ cries out:

c. What Is My Situation? Save Me from Foreigners and Falsehoods! (v5-8)

⁵ *Bow your heavens, O LORD, and come down!
Touch the mountains so that they smoke!*
⁶ *Flash forth the lightning and scatter them;
send out your arrows and rout them!*
⁷ *Stretch out your hand from on high;
rescue me and deliver me from the many waters,
from the hand of foreigners,*
⁸ *whose mouths speak lies
and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.*

And here we see the situation of our Davidic King!
There are lots of echoes here from Psalm 18 –
lots of language borrowed from there.
But also there is language from Psalm 104 –
reminding us of Sinai – when the LORD came down
and revealed himself to Moses.

But here we are in a different situation.
We are no longer at Sinai –
where Israel was alone with God at the beginning of their life together!
And we are no longer with David at the beginning of the Kingdom.

Now we are surrounded by many waters –
the hand of foreigners –
the lies and falsehoods that come at me from every side.

Think about that last line:
“whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.”

They aren’t necessarily “mean” people.
They are extending the right hand of fellowship!

When we went through Ezra-Nehemiah
we saw that there were lots of “well-meaning” foreigners
surrounding Israel.
They were “decent folk” who just wanted everyone to get along!

You worship your god – we’ll worship our gods –
and when my daughter marries your son –
we’ll do a big feast and offer sacrifices to both!!
One big happy family!!

“whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.”

Book Five of the Psalter was collected and edited during the post-Exilic period.
That doesn’t mean that all the Psalms in Book Five were *written* then –
but it does mean that the shape of Book Five is strongly influenced
by that “Ezra-Nehemiah” context.

But that also means that Book Five was collected and edited in a time
where there *was no* Davidic king.
It took faith to say that God will be faithful to his covenant promise –
to rescue David – and me, for that matter!

2. Praying the New Song – Singing the Victory of Jesus (v9-15)
**a. Praise the God Who Rescues David – and Me – from Foreigners and
Falsehoods (v9-11)**

⁹ *I will sing a new song to you, O God;
upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you,*

You can see in verse 9 that the “I” has become a different voice than David.

This is very much a song *about David*.

The first person singular is an Israelite voice asking God to remember his steadfast love –
his covenant promises to David –

You are the one who rescues David
therefore *rescue me*.

¹⁰ *who gives victory to kings,
who rescues David his servant from the cruel sword.*

¹¹ *Rescue me and deliver me
from the hand of foreigners,
whose mouths speak lies
and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.*

In Jesus we sing the New Song!

As we’ve seen before, a “new song” does not mean “an original song” –
any more than a “love song” means a song that you love.

No, just as a “love song” is a song *about* love.

So also a “new song” is a song *about* the new thing that God has done.

If a “new song” meant “an original song” –
then as soon as you sing the words, “I will sing a new song” –
you must stop singing the song,
and start improvising an original composition!

The new song is a victory song.
A song about the new things that God has done.
Psalm 144 is a New Song.
It is a song about the new victory.
And every time we sing Psalm 144 we sing it anew!

This is why I often encourage you to *pray the Psalms*.
Praying the Psalms is not just reading the Psalms.
When you pray them,
you are weaving together the language of the Psalm
with the content of your own life.
These Psalms, after all, were written in order to connect the life of God’s people
with their Messianic King.
Because God is with David – and I belong to David –
therefore God is with me.

It’s even more true today!
Because God is with Jesus – and I belong to Jesus –
therefore God is with me!

Because God continues to fulfill his promises.
He rescues us.
He delivers us from the hand of foreigners –
whose mouths speak lies
and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.

The same prayer that David prayed is now the prayer that “I” pray in Jesus.
Rescue me from those who offer their friendship –
but their friendship is ultimately only going to lead me into ruin.

And we pray this for our children as well!

b. And Pray for Your Children and Your Prosperity (v12-14)

¹² *May our sons in their youth
be like plants full grown,
our daughters like corner pillars
cut for the structure of a palace;*

Most modern commentators have ignored the most interesting connections in this verse!

They say things like:

may our sons be robust and hearty –
and our daughters be good-looking and well-shaped.

But the word translated “palace” is ordinarily translated *temple* –
except when the King’s palace is in view.

And since we’ve already heard some Genesis language in this Psalm (Adam and hebel),
it might be worth remembering that God *built* Eve from Adam’s side
(and the term translated “side” is an architectural term for the side of a building).

So let’s translate a little more woodenly:

Our daughters are to be like corner stones cut for the pattern of a temple.
That’s not just “good-looking and shapely”!

We want our daughters to resemble the temple!

Leviticus does a lot with the connection of women’s bodies and the holy place.
There’s a reason why both our heavenly Mother (the heavenly Jerusalem)
and Babylon (the Mother of harlots) are portrayed as women!

Because we want our daughters to be mini-temples.

Okay daughters – I’m sorry, but you need to see it!!
It’s all about your period!!

Every month, you shed blood –
just like at the temple.

And the only time when you *don’t* shed blood every month –
is because you are engaged in making a baby –
bringing forth a new life

(and if you think about all that “heavenly Mother” language –
there is something profoundly appropriate
about describing the “new birth” that way).

We must be born again!

Which means that unless we are conceived in the womb of the church,
born of her – and nourished at her breasts –
we have no life.

But this then gets one thinking that maybe our sons aren’t just hale and hearty either...

If you look more carefully at the text,
you discover that no, it just means “hale and hearty” –
(sorry, guys, I tried!!).

But then verses 13 and 14 speak of our economic life:

¹³ *may our granaries be full,
providing all kinds of produce;
may our sheep bring forth thousands
and ten thousands in our fields;*
¹⁴ *may our cattle be heavy with young,
suffering no mishap or failure in bearing;^[b]
may there be no cry of distress in our streets!*

I know that the Revelation series can start making you wonder
“Is it even okay to *pray* for prosperity?!”
But Psalm 144 is useful for us here!

If you are seeking *first* the kingdom of God –
if your *heart* is set on things above – not on earthly things –
then *yes*, you can pray that God will provide for all of your needs!!
You can pray for God’s *bountiful blessing* on you and on all those who fear him!

Because:

c. Blessed Are the People Whose God Is the LORD (v15)

¹⁵ *Blessed are the people to whom such blessings fall!
Blessed are the people whose God is the LORD!*

Remember that this Psalm was sung at a time when Judah was an itty-bitty country –
the size of St. Joe and Elkhart Counties put together.

People here at MCPC this morning
drove from distances that would have been *outside the country!*

If this was Jerusalem – then Three Rivers would be way outside Judah!
Goshen would be across the Dead Sea in Edomite territory.

Blessed are the people whose God is Yahweh.
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ!
You who have believed in Jesus have become those to whom such blessings fall!

Truly you are blessed!