

"THE LORD IS MY ROCK"

I. Introduction

- A. First and Second Samuel are bookended by two songs in which God is praised for how he extends his grace to those who have no other source of help.
1. The first song was the prayer of Hannah back in 1 Samuel 2, where she gave thanks to the Lord for giving her a son.
 2. The second song is the one we have just read, which David composed near the end of his life.
 3. As we noted when we studied Hannah's prayer, the writer of Samuel used this device in order to call our attention to his overarching theme.
 4. The books of Samuel tell the story of how God lifts up a people who know that they have no ability to lift themselves up.
- B. David's song is prefaced by a verse that tells us that he wrote this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of his enemies, especially from the hand of Saul.
1. The fact that David's life was filled with conflicts against many foes suggests that he wrote this song while looking back on a lifetime of deliverances.
 2. It is a personal song of thanks, but in Psalm 18 it appears in a slightly adapted form so that it could be used in public worship.
 3. Notice that as David takes stock of his life, he does not view it as the story of his own greatness and his own accomplishments.

4. Instead, he sees it as the story of the wonderful things that the Lord has done for him, and he gives God the glory for these things.
5. This song teaches us how we should view our own lives, and how we should respond to God's goodness to us.
6. In the words of Matthew Henry, "Every new mercy in our hand should put a new song into our mouth, even praises to our God. Where there is a grateful heart, out of the abundance of that the mouth will speak."

II. The Rescuer of the Desperate (1-20)

- A. David begins his song of praise by referring to the Lord as his rock.
 1. This image appears five times in this song.
 2. It is an image that describes different aspects of God's care for his people.
 3. Since rocks offer protection and shade in desert climates, they can be symbolic of the way God is our source of shelter and refreshment amid the desert-like experiences that we face in life.
 4. Rocks can also provide a good place to hide, as David knew firsthand from the times when he had to flee from his enemies.
 5. In the same way, God is the hiding place of his people.
 6. He is our fortress and stronghold against all that seeks our ruin.
 7. Lastly, rocks can provide a solid foundation upon which we can stand.
 8. The image is used this way in Psalm 40:2, where David says, "He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure."

9. When I visited Donna Horton this week, she told me that this sense of the Bible's rock imagery has been especially helpful to her in the midst of her sickness.
 10. She said that there have been times when she has felt like she is sinking, but then she remembers that her feet are planted on solid ground because Christ is her rock.
 11. That is a truth that we all need to keep in mind.
 12. No matter how unstable our circumstances may be, if we belong to Christ we can know for certain that we are on a foundation that can never be shaken.
- B. David continues his song of praise by saying that the Lord saves him from his enemies.
1. As long as we are in this world, we will have enemies who seek to do us harm.
 2. But none of these enemies will triumph over us.
 3. As Matthew Henry reminds us, "We shall never be delivered from all our enemies till we get to heaven; and to that heavenly kingdom God will preserve all that are his."
 4. No matter what threatens us in this life, we can be confident that our God will deliver us.
 5. The apostle Paul expressed such hope when he wrote these words to Timothy from his Roman prison cell: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom." (2 Tim 4:18 ESV)
- C. In verses 5 and 6, David uses a series of vivid images to describe the desperate situations he faced when his enemies rose up against him.
1. He was surrounded by death.

2. He was being swallowed up by death.
 3. He was in the clutches of death.
 4. Then, when all hope seemed lost, he cried out to the Lord.
 5. This is always the right way to respond to the troubles that confront us in life, whatever they may be.
 6. Cry out to the Lord.
 7. This is not always our first impulse.
 8. Sometimes our troubles hinder our prayers.
 9. We can get caught up in feelings of despair over our situation.
 10. We can begin to doubt that God really cares about us.
 11. If you ever sense that you are falling into that trap, cry out to the Lord for help.
 12. For, as David attests, God hears us when we call out to him.
 13. Our cries always reach his ears.
- D. David then describes God's intervention, and he does so in a manner that brings to mind something like an earthquake or a volcano.
1. The Lord's movements were so powerful that they caused the world to come apart at the seams.
 2. While this is not a literal description of what happened when God delivered David, the poetic imagery conveys the theological truth of what happened.
 3. David knew that these deliverances were not due to his own craftiness, or luck, or the help that he received from others.

4. He believed that God had acted for him.
5. God heard his pleas for help and rescued him out of his desperate plight.
6. David's song teaches us that we need to train ourselves to credit God for the deliverances that he brings about in our lives.
7. God's activity in our lives may not seem all that earth-shaking to us, but we have to remind ourselves that the One who upholds the entire universe really is ordering all things for our good.

III. The Refuge of the Humble (21-31)

- A. We turn now to the middle section of David's song, where he says things that could easily be misunderstood.
 1. This section begins in verse 21, where David says, "The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me."
 2. It might sound like David is saying that he did something to merit the deliverances that God worked for him.
 3. It might sound like David put God in his debt.
 4. Of course, the words of David's song are true.
 5. God does indeed reward the righteous.
 6. But what we have to remember is that it is only by God's grace that anyone can be counted as righteous.
 7. Any reward that we receive for our obedience cannot be a reward that we have merited, for the simple reason that none of our obedience is free from the stain of sin.
 8. As John Calvin explains, "If, therefore, none of our works please God, unless the sin which mingles with them is pardoned, it

follows, that the recompense which he bestows on account of them proceeds not from our merit, but from his free and undeserved grace.”

- B. We should also keep in mind the context in which David spoke these words.
1. He is not boasting of his obedience or claiming to be without sin.
 2. He is defending himself against the false accusations of his enemies.
 3. He is saying that he did not deserve the ill-treatment that he received at the hands of his enemies.
 4. He is saying that he was vindicated by God’s deliverances.
- C. Still, we might wonder how David could say that he kept the ways of the Lord.
1. David did commit some grievous sins throughout his lifetime, but those sins were committed in the weakness of his flesh.
 2. He never turned his back on God’s ways entirely.
 3. He never apostatized.
 4. That is why he could honestly say, “I... have not wickedly departed from my God.”
 5. In spite of his failures, he did walk with the Lord.
 6. His faith bore fruit.
 7. God led him in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.
 8. As David looked back on his life, he was able to say that he had kept to the paths of the Lord.

- D. That being said, there is also a sense in which the claims that David makes here point beyond himself.
1. Passages like this are both the prayers of men and the word of God.
 2. We sometimes find it difficult to express certain portions of such passages as prayers of our own.
 3. Who of us would feel comfortable giving thanks for how the Lord rewarded us according to the cleanness of our hands?
 4. Listen to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's observations on this: "A psalm that we cannot utter as a prayer, that makes us falter and horrifies us, is a hint to us that here Someone else is praying, not we; that the One who is here protesting his innocence, who is invoking God's judgment, who has come to such infinite depths of suffering, is none other than Jesus Christ himself. He it is who is praying here, and not only here but in the whole Psalter." [*Life Together*, 45]
 5. Ultimately, David's song points to Christ.
 6. Only Jesus can claim absolute righteousness before God.
 7. Only he can say without qualification that the Lord has rewarded him according to the cleanness of his hands.

IV. The Strength of His People (32-51)

- A. We come to a new section in verse 32, a section in which the emphasis is upon how the Lord gave David strength and skill for battle.
1. David was a great warrior-king.
 2. He was victorious in many military contests.
 3. But he gives God the credit for these accomplishments.
 4. This is an important aspect of biblical piety.

5. We always need to remember that all of our accomplishments are really God's accomplishments.
 6. He deserves all of the praise, all of the thanks, all of the credit.
- B. After describing the many victories that he gained through the Lord's strength, David then says that God kept him as "the head of the nations."
1. We would have to take this as a poetic exaggeration if we saw it as only applying to David.
 2. While it is true that the kingdom of Israel enjoyed a period of significant expansion under David's reign, he was certainly not the head of all nations.
 3. But Jesus Christ is.
 4. The nations are his heritage, and the ends of the earth are his possession.
 5. This is why verse 50, which says, "For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations" is cited in Romans 15:9 as a prophecy fulfilled in Christ.

V. Conclusion

- A. We noted at the beginning of this sermon that David sang this song near the end of his life.
1. It is the song of his life.
 2. We have also noted that this psalm is not ultimately about David but about Christ.
 3. In his office as king, David was a typological foreshadowing of Christ.
 4. The cords of death encompassed Jesus, and the torrents of destruction assailed him, but the Lord rescued him because he

delighted in him.

5. Only Jesus can speak the words "The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness" without having to make any qualifications.
 6. In the fullest sense, this is the song of Christ's life.
- B. At the same time, if you belong to Jesus Christ, then this is the song of your life as well.
1. Because Jesus perfectly kept the ways of the Lord, you can trust that God hears your voice in the day of your calamity.
 2. He is your rock and your fortress.
 3. He draws you out of many waters.
 4. He equips you with strength.
 5. He makes your way blameless.
 6. His gentleness makes you great.
 7. The more you reflect upon all that the Lord has done for you, the more clearly you will see that he is indeed worthy to be praised.