

A Meditation on Deliverance

2 Samuel 22:1–51

The Twenty-Third Sermon on Second Samuel

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Assuming Jesus doesn't come for us first, when you look back at the end of your life, what are the kinds of things you want to remember? The places you saw? The people you knew? The family you were a part of? And when you put all that together, what do you want to say? 2 Samuel 22 is a beautiful example to us of this, as David looks back. What does he remember? What does he say?

What's interesting here is that as I said last week, most of the material in this section of chapters 21–24 are not chronological, so we're not exactly sure when these stories happened. Chapter 21 happened sometime in the three years after Saul's death, and chapter 22 happened after some deliverance from Saul, as verse 1 says. But the narrator puts it at the end just before the last words of David. The Holy Spirit who inspired these words as well as the structure of these words, wants us to take a retrospective look at David's life. And as we are near the end of the books of Samuel and there is a retrospective meditation, so near the beginning we read Hannah's prospective meditation. She called the Lord her "strength" or "horn" (1 Sam. 2:1) and said he would "exalt the strength" (horn) of his anointed" (1 Sam. 2:10). She looked forward to a day of deliverance for Israel. Now at the end, who is that "horn?" David, who says, "**The Lord is...the horn of my salvation**" (vv. 2, 3).

What's also interesting here is that David's retrospective look on his life is what is called a chiasm. Just imagine or write down an "x." Notice how the points at the top correspond to the points at the bottom. And those points all come together in the center. Look the opening praise in verses 2-3; they correspond with the praise at the end in verses 47-51. And how does each section begin? With the Lord. Now look at David's remembrance of his deliverance in verses 4-20; they correspond with the second remembrance of his deliverance in verses 29-46. And how does each section begin? With the Lord. Finally, in the middle, which is the most important section in verses 21-28 David speaks of his cleanness and God's faithfulness. And how does this section begin? With the Lord.

Enough details, let's look at David's *meditation on deliverance* with the following three points. Remember, what would you remember and what would you say as you look back on your life?

1. *A God Praised in Deliverance*
2. *A God Faithful in Deliverance*
3. *A God Empowering in Deliverance*

May the Holy Spirit lead us into the truth of his Word today.

A God Praised in Deliverance (vv. 2-20, 47-51)

The first thing David remembers and says about God is that he is *a God praised in deliverance*. He actually begins and ends this meditation with praise of God, doesn't he? And he begins by heaping up descriptive term after descriptive

term for the Lord: **“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence”** (vv. 2–3) And at the end he does the same: **“The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock, and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation”** (v. 47). He’s stretching his imagination and his vocabulary to praise his delivering God. As the psalmist would later say, “Who can utter the mighty deeds of the Lord, or declare all his praise” (Ps. 106:2). In the words of the poet, Isaac Watts,

Join all the glorious names of wisdom, love, and power,
That ever mortal knew, that angels ever bore;
All are too poor to speak his worth,
Too poor to set my Savior forth.

What does this mean for us? David shows us that at the end of our lives we need to remember that from the beginning of our lives all the way to the end of it, and everywhere in between, that it is God who has made us, God who has saved us, God who has protected us, and God who has brought us through. He’s done this with our day-to-day lives and he’s done this with our salvation.

Have you ever read J.I. Packer’s little book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*? I know I’ve mentioned it at sometime. He begins his book by saying that all Christians, whether self-consciously Calvinist or self-consciously Arminian, believe in the sovereignty of God. Why? Because all Christians thank God for saving them and because all Christians pray for God to save their loved ones. Now, some refuse to be consistent in this in their minds, but in their hearts that show that they believe God is sovereign. Why do I mention this? It illustrates for us that

at the end of a believers' life, no believer is going to say, "I thank myself that I chose Christ," or, "I thank you God for doing all that you have done, but to let me make the choice that actually saved me." No! That would be a miserable Christianity! That would not be a religion worth living for and especially worth dying for! It is God alone who **"brought down peoples under me, who brought me out from my enemies; you exalted me above those who rose against me; you delivered me from men of violence. For this I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations, and sing praises to your name. Great salvation he brings to his king"** (vv. 48–51).

A God Faithful in Deliverance (vv. 21–28)

Now I mentioned that at the heart of this chiasmic Psalm are verses 21–28. Here David remembers and says about God that he is *a God faithful in deliverance*. Look again at verses 2–3: **"The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence."** Now look at verse 21, which summarizes all of verses 21–28: **"The Lord dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me."** What? Is David confused? First he says the Lord is to be praised but then he goes on to say that the Lord rewarded him for his own righteousness. And why would I then say he is looking back and saying that God was faithful in deliverance if David says it was all about him?

Some scholars have said either that this section was not original but was added later or that what David says here is flat out wrong. One major Old Testament commentator, whom I generally find to be insightful, said this: “For David to make such a claim is odd and incongruous, for Israel knows better.”¹ In other words, this isn’t the Word of God; it’s wrong to say this. What David says here is sort of like when our President was asked early in his first term how he would grade himself and he said, “A-, solid B+.”

So we know that David was a vile sinner, I mean, just ask Bathsheba who missed her murdered husband, Uriah. And we know that David believed he was accepted by God not because of his works but because of the grace and mercy of God, when he said in Psalm 32: “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity” (vv. 1–2). And just go read how rabbi-turned-apostle Paul said this an Old Testament expression of justification by faith in Romans 4. So what gives? How are we to understand this?

The answer is that this is how believers speak because they are in a covenant relationship with the Lord. “Dad, I picked up my room. Can I have a candy bar now?” You see, my son, whom I loved even before he was conceived, and whom I decided to enter into the sacred relationship of father-son at his birth, had a conversation with me and I told him that he couldn’t have one of the candies from a birthday party he went to until he picked up his room. So he went upstairs,

¹ Brueggemann, 343.

cleaned up, and now wants his reward that I promised. Is the pillow on the wrong side of the bed? Perhaps. Did he dust the floor boards? No. Is one drawer slightly open with a sock visibly protruding out? Yes, but that's a minor detail. Did he do what I asked? Overall, yes.

You see, the Lord has entered into a relationship with David by grace alone. And within this relationship, the Lord has promised to bless and yes, reward, David for being faithful to him. And even this is by his grace alone. The covenant relationship David had with the Lord just like that we have with the Father, through the Son, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is all of grace. In fact, our own Heidelberg Catechism says this: "How can you say that the good we do doesn't earn anything when God promises to reward it in this life and the next? This rewards is not earned; it is a gift of grace" (HC, Q&A 63). You see, in the end, this means that even when the Lord gives based on something we do, it is gracious, and it testifies to the Lord's faithfulness to his covenant even when we are not faithful.²

So, here David is claiming that he like a son to a father is in a covenant relationship with the Lord. He's not claiming perfection or sinlessness. Has he sinned? Absolutely! We've already seen that. What has he done when he's sinned? With Bathsheba and Uriah he's repented and he's confessed (just read Psalm 51). So when David now is looking back on his life, he remembers that God is *faithful* to all his covenant promises, including those to bless and reward David by grace.

² On these verses, see the helpful comments of Blaikie, 356–359, and Leithart, 302–305.

A God Empowering in Deliverance (vv. 29–46)

There's a third big idea about God that David remembers here: *God is empowering in deliverance*. When you read in verses 4–20 David speaks of God miraculously delivering him from Saul time and time again using the language of the plagues, the Red Sea, the wilderness, and Mount Sinai. And as I mentioned, that section of David's meditation corresponds to verses 29–46, where we read a development about this deliverance: the Lord delivered David through the means of empowering David to fight his enemies.

Let me explain it like this. I hope you as an individual, as couples, and as families pause before every meal you eat to pray. And what specifically do we pray before meals? We give thanks, don't we? You've just bought food at a drive-thru, or you've just made a meal, or mom or dad have just cooked for some time, and then what do we say? "Thank you, Lord, for this food." Why thank the Lord for the food that you may have grown, prepared, and put before yourself or another? We thank the Lord because we recognize that he has used the means of mom or a cook to provide that food for us. We say thank you to them, but we realize that ultimately it comes from God.

And we see that here. Notice these verses and remember the stories we've read of David in 1–2 Samuel. "**For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall**" (v. 30). Notice the language God empowering: "**by you...by my God.**" Again, "**He made my feet like the feet of a deer...He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze**" (vv. 34, 35). It

was God who trained David, like a drill sergeant, but it was David who pulled the trigger. How many battles did Presidents FDR and Trueman win in WWII? None, if you think of them personally, but all of them if you think of the chain of command that they took responsibility for as Commander in Chief. Isn't this how we think of our sanctification? Who sanctifies us? God. How does he sanctify us? Through means of us hearing the Word, partaking of the sacraments, praying, putting on the armor of God, and the list goes on.

Conclusion

What will you remember and what will you say as you look back on your life one way? I pray you remember Jesus Christ and how he delivered you. Praise him for it! See his faithfulness despite you in it! Marvel at his empowerment of you because of it! Amen.