
The King's Song of Deliverance

2 Samuel 21:15 - 22:51²³

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Who takes credit when things go well for you?

Your children...

Your work...

Your ministry...

So what does giving God the praise look like? Here is King David, at the end of his reign, praising God for all that God has accomplished through David.

One of the challenges for us in preaching this text is its length. We really ought to be looking at 2 Samuel 21:15 - 23:39. This would be 99 verses as we have it in our English Bibles. Why do I say this is a single unit? Look at its structure:

The Triumphs of David's Mighty Men (21:15-22)

Rejoice: A Song of Gratitude for Deliverance (22:1-51)

Requiem: A Song of Praise in Death (23:1-7)

The Testimony to David's Mighty Men (23:8-39)

Gratitude is an important part of the life of God's people. It is the overflow of being graced. In the heart, gratitude displaces grumbling and complaining. So when life is hard or disappointing, when you want to complain about people or problems, give thanks. Contentment and thankfulness are the twin children of grace and mighty warriors who overcome the giants named Complain and Grumble.

The Greatness of God's Triumphs (21:15-22)

David's public service began with the killing of the Philistine giant, Goliath. **1 Samuel 17:45-47**

⁴⁵ Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will

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give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, **that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,** ⁴⁷ and **that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear.** [For] **the battle is the LORD's,** and he will give you into our hand."

The point of that event and narrative is:

To show the world that the true God is Israel's God.

To show the Israelites that they must not rely on human strength or strategies, but on Divine power and purposes.

The military accomplishments of four of David's soldiers are recorded as the context for David's song of praise. God has done great things through David. But David is surrounded by very capable warriors who have also been used by God to exhibit His power and express His glory.

The Rescue of David from the Philistine Giant (21:15-17)

So retelling of the triumphs of David's mighty men begins with the story of the rescue of David.

¹⁵ There was war again between the Philistines and Israel, and David went down together with his servants, and they fought against the Philistines. And David grew weary. ¹⁶ And Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giants, whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze, and who was armed with a new sword, thought to kill David. ¹⁷ But Abishai the son of Zeruiah came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, "You shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel."

The first is a surprising story. We usually think of David's victory over Goliath. But there was a time in the Philistines wars where David faced another Philistine giant. But against this giant David wearied and was in danger of defeat. He was rescued by Abishai, Joab's brother. After that, David was discouraged from going out into the front lines of the battle. Let others fight for God and Israel. David is the leader and the light of Israel. His loss on the battlefield would be devastating to the nation.

The Victories over the Philistine Giants (21:18-22)

Three other significant victories are recorded.

¹⁸ After this there was again war with the Philistines at Gob. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giants. ¹⁹ And there was again war with the Philistines at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, struck down Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. ²⁰ And there was again war at Gath, where there was a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number, and he also was descended from the giants. ²¹ And when he taunted Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's

brother, struck him down.²² These four were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.

These four giants were all from Gath. It is likely they were related. Goliath was said to have had five brothers – possibly here they are. However, there is a second giant by the same name and the unnamed one who had six toes and fingers and was larger than the other giants seems to have been from a different stock. He also was struck down by one of David's mighty men.

So the Philistine giants of Gath are brought down to defeat. God brings about the victory through these mighty warriors who fight with and for King David.

The Gratitude for God's Triumphs (22:1-51)

¹ And David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. ² He said,

David composes a song to praise God and commemorate his victories over Saul and all his enemies. This is probably an early version of what we have in Psalm 18. Both are equally inspired and have their place in the Bible even though they are different. It is not as though we need to figure out the real song or why the differences between them (some text outside of the Bible being a source for the chronicler and for Asaph). Rather, it is better to accept that the Spirit inspired both of these as different versions of the celebration of God's victories through His King, David.

This is also a song about Christ. It is lifted to Him in David's day. But it is also about Him in the day of His triumph over sin and Satan. David had a prophetic role in writing the Messianic Psalms (Acts 2:30-31). Paul in Romans 15:8-9 quotes 2 Samuel 22:50 or Psalm 18:49 to say, "⁸ For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, ⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.'"

Christ is the One who can praise God among the Gentiles in fulfillment of this text. Additionally, there are verses in this song that go beyond any reference to David. They clearly are referring to the Lord's greater, final victories (22:5-7, 21-25, 44-46). So as we listen and think about this Psalm, we will see beyond David to the day of Christ. As one author put it:

This is not only a song about Christ, but a song of Christ – put, to be sure, in the mouth of David, but in the spirit of prophecy as a foretaste of the actual victory and exaltation of Christ. From this perspective, the song expresses Christ's delight in the Father (22:2-4), his distress in dying for sinners (22:5-7), his deliverance from his sufferings (22:8-20), the reasons for this deliverance (22:21-30), the establishment of his kingly rule over the nations (22:31-46) and the praise of Christ the King as he is exalted in the final triumphant consummation of the everlasting kingdom of God in glory (22:47-51). [Keddie, p. 219-220]

What particular things is David thankful for? How do those point us to Christ?

For How God Saved Him (22:2–28)

David praises God for He has saved him in so many situations in so many ways.

In God's Protection (22:2–7)

"The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
³ 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.
⁴ I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,
 and I am saved from my enemies.

⁵ "For the waves of death encompassed me,
 the torrents of destruction assailed me;
⁶ the cords of Sheol entangled me;
 the snares of death confronted me.

⁷ "In my distress I called upon the Lord;
 to my God I called.
 From his temple he heard my voice,
 and my cry came to his ears.

David praises God for protection from his enemies. God is his fortress and his refuge. God is a fortress to him. Even when under great threat and attack, he is safe within the Lord, who saves him and delivers him.

David praises from for protection from destruction and death. David understands something we often struggle with. God does not promise to protect us nor to deliver us from dying. Bu He does protect us in death. When destruction and death reaches out their cold hands to snuff out the warmth of living, God is there. He walks through dying with us.

Christ delights in His Heavenly Father who sustains Him through the distress of His redemptive work on the cross. God protected Him from unbelief and disobedience and fear. Jesus cried out to God throughout His life but especially in the days nearing the cross. He was heard, not because of His loud crying, but because of His respect for His Father.

By God's Power (22:8–16)

David praises God for His great power seen in a creation metaphor.

⁸ "Then the earth reeled and rocked;
 the foundations of the heavens trembled
 and quaked, because he was angry.

⁹ Smoke went up from his nostrils,
 and devouring fire from his mouth;
 glowing coals flamed forth from him.

¹⁰ He bowed the heavens and came down;

thick darkness was under his feet.
¹¹ He rode on a cherub and flew;
 he was seen on the wings of the wind.
¹² He made darkness around him his canopy,
 thick clouds, a gathering of water.
¹³ Out of the brightness before him
 coals of fire flamed forth.
¹⁴ The Lord thundered from heaven,
 and the Most High uttered his voice.
¹⁵ And he sent out arrows and scattered them;
 lightning, and routed them.
¹⁶ Then the channels of the sea were seen;
 the foundations of the world were laid bare,
 at the rebuke of the Lord,
 at the blast of the breath of his nostrils.

The gathering storm is God riding in as a mighty army. He breathes and trumpets and moves with mighty power. He not only storms in the heavens but also shakes the earth. God's mighty power moves on behalf of God's people to bring about the victory. Christ's victory began in weakness at the cross. But it will be consummated in the eschatological day when He comes to wreck vengeance on His enemies. The powerful imagery here describes that final day of judgment that are vividly used in the rest of Scripture.

With God's Provision (22:17-25)

David praises God for His provision which is grounded in righteousness.

¹⁷ "He sent from on high, he took me;
 he drew me out of many waters.
¹⁸ He rescued me from my strong enemy,
 from those who hated me,
 for they were too mighty for me.
¹⁹ They confronted me in the day of my calamity,
 but the Lord was my support.
²⁰ He brought me out into a broad place;
 he rescued me, because he delighted in me.
²¹ "The Lord dealt with me according to my righteousness;
 according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.
²² For I have kept the ways of the Lord
 and have not wickedly departed from my God.
²³ For all his rules were before me,
 and from his statutes I did not turn aside.
²⁴ I was blameless before him,
 and I kept myself from guilt.
²⁵ And the Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
 according to my cleanness in his sight.

God has rescued David from a flood of enemies. David was often surrounded by personal and public enemies. There were times it felt like an overwhelming flood in which he was drowning. They were too mighty, strong and numerous for David. But God rescued him. Sometimes that rescue was through the skill God gave David. It was often through the power and ability God gave to those who served the King.

God has dealt with David according to his righteousness. How could David say this? He knows he has sinned. He knows he is not perfect. But God has given David his righteousness. And it is on the ground of that righteousness that comes through faith (David can read Genesis, right?) that God treats him.

This is where the statements must refer to someone beyond David. There is an absolute since of being not only righteous, but sinless. King Jesus is the only One who can claim to be absolutely righteous and blameless. God has rewarded Him because of His faithfulness. See how this opens and closes? "He has dealt with me (v. 17) and He has rewarded me (v. 25) according to my righteousness."

God rescues His people because of the righteousness of Christ. He declares us to be righteous. And He treats according to the righteousness He has granted us.

According to God's Perfect Character (22:26–28)

God deals with people according to His perfect character.

- ²⁶ "With the merciful you show yourself merciful;
with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;
- ²⁷ with the purified you deal purely,
and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.
- ²⁸ You save a humble people,
but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down.

David is thankful that God acts according to His character. This means that God is trustworthy. He is merciful, holy, pure and humble. (Yes, God is humble otherwise pride is virtue not a vice). He responds in kind to those who are merciful, holy, pure and humble. But he will deal with crooked and the haughty. He will judge. He will bring them down. God can always be trusted to act according to His character. He will save according to His mercy. This David well knew and was very thankful.

For How God Enabled Him (22:29–51)

David is not only thankful for how God delivered him, but also for how God enabled him.

As the Warrior for God (22:29–43)

David praises God for giving him what he needs to defeat his enemies.

The skill to defeat his foes (22:29–37)

²⁹ For you are my lamp, O Lord,
and my God lightens my darkness.
³⁰ For by you I can run against a troop,
and by my God I can leap over a wall.
³¹ This God—his way is perfect;
the word of the Lord proves true;
he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.
³² “For who is God, but the Lord?
And who is a rock, except our God?
³² “For who is God, but the Lord?
And who is a rock, except our God?
³³ This God is my strong refuge
and has made my way blameless.
³⁴ He made my feet like the feet of a deer
and set me secure on the heights.
³⁵ He trains my hands for war,
so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.
³⁶ You have given me the shield of your salvation,
and your gentleness made me great.
³⁷ You gave a wide place for my steps under me,
and my feet did not slip;

So David is thankful that’s God triumphs are grounded in His proven dependability. He is a reliable light in darkness. He is a rock in the storms. He is a shield of salvation. He is incomparable – all the false gods cannot compare. In an arresting sentence David sums up the paradoxes at work in these images. “God’s gentleness had made David great...” God was gentle with David so he might be strong and powerful and victorious for God.

David is thankful for the practical physical skills and abilities God has given him. He is able to do all these things. But it is “by my God...” We don’t think like this. Yes, we think in terms sometimes of spiritual gifts that manifest themselves in skilled ministry. But what about just the physical skills to do all that God has given you to do?

So in both of these – God’s dependability and David’s ability, God’s ways are best. They may not always seem so to us, but His Word will prove to be true. God’s Word tells us God’s ways. God’s ways work themselves out in our life through His working in our situations and in our souls.

The strength to defeat his foes (22:38–46)

³⁸ I pursued my enemies and destroyed them,
and did not turn back until they were consumed.
³⁹ I consumed them; I thrust them through, so that they did not rise;
they fell under my feet.
⁴⁰ For you equipped me with strength for the battle;
you made those who rise against me sink under me.
⁴¹ You made my enemies turn their backs to me,
those who hated me, and I destroyed them.
⁴² They looked, but there was none to save;
they cried to the Lord, but he did not answer them.
⁴³ I beat them fine as the dust of the earth;
I crushed them and stamped them down like the mire of the streets.

What is skill without strength? David praises God for the strength to use the skills God had given. He is not praising his own physical prowess. He is praising God's power in and through him that brought about total victory. Because God had given him both the skill and the strength, then he utterly defeated his enemies.

As the Worshiper of God (22:44–51)

The song closes with David the worshipper of God.

⁴⁴ "You delivered me from strife with my people;
you kept me as the head of the nations;
people whom I had not known served me.
⁴⁵ Foreigners came cringing to me;
as soon as they heard of me, they obeyed me.
⁴⁶ Foreigners lost heart
and came trembling out of their fortresses.
⁴⁷ "The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock,
and exalted be my God, the rock of my salvation,
⁴⁸ the God who gave me vengeance
and brought down peoples under me,
⁴⁹ who brought me out from my enemies;
you exalted me above those who rose against me;
you delivered me from men of violence.
⁵⁰ "For this I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations,
and sing praises to your name.
⁵¹ Great salvation he brings to his king,
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his offspring forever."

David worships God as the revered leader of all the nations (v. 44-49). God has elevated him as king. He is the king of his people. He is respected and revered by

the nations. He has brought down his enemies. He has been protected from those who would have destroyed him.

David worships God with joyful praises among all the nations (v. 50-51). In this last stanza David is saying through psalm so that we may see through this praise the magnificently greater glory of Jesus. His rule and reign will be over all the nations. In all the people groups His Name will be revered and His praise lifted up.

Why? Because God will show steadfast love to His anointed, to David and his descendants forever. We who are the spiritual descendants of Abraham and who have been laced into the spiritual kingdom of David, rejoice. Why? Because God has loved us, forever.

Reflect and Respond

Praise to Jesus.

Praise Jesus for all that He accomplishes through His people.

Praise Jesus for the salvation and deliverance He brings to His people.

Praise Jesus for the skill, strength and steadiness He pours into His people.

Praise Jesus for the supremacy and sovereignty He holds over His people.

Praise to Jesus.

Notes