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Psalm 18

Introduction – How are we to listen to a piece of poetry intended to be set to music, a psalm? Like every piece of poetry, every song worthy of your attention, it requires listening to it over and over, hearing the connections to other poems and songs and stories. And this is the way to receive and participate in Psalm 18. This psalm was sung, if not written, at the end of David's life (2 Sam 22). When you listen and meditate, you find that you cannot stop thinking about Moses hiding behind the rock in order to see the glory of God, of Job being answered by a whirlwind, of Abraham climbing up a mountain to offer human sacrifice, of the angels and elders in Revelation falling down before the Lamb, and of bowls of wrath being poured out upon the earth. You hear of warriors and men whose hands are fitted for war, of shields and weapons and you remember Egypt where the angel of death made mothers weep and the destruction of the Egyptian army at the Red Sea which left those same women widows – all by the hand of the God of the Hebrews. What you hear in this song is the sound of a God who is wild, uncontrollable, loyal but not tame, dependable but unpredictable. This is the song of YHWH the Warrior King.

The Text – *"I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock...."* – Psalm 18

Structure – This is the third longest psalm of the 150 and so it is important to see its structure, to look at the map, so to speak. Many see the psalm in 6 parts. The first three sections could be summarized as A Praise to YHWH my Rock (vv1-3), The Song of Deliverance (vv 4-19), and The Reason YHWH Delivers (vv20-24). The last three sections repeat the first three but in reverse order in what is known as a chiasmic structure (4 repeats 3, 5 repeats 2, and 6 repeats 1). They might be summarized as How YHWH Deals with His People (vv25-29), The Victory of YHWH's Servant (vv30-45), and Praise to the Conquering Warrior (vv46-50).

Praise to YHWH my Rock, the Conquering Warrior (Sections 1 and 6) – As David reflects upon the work of God throughout his life, he bookends this psalm by saying that *"I will love You...I will call upon You...I will give thanks to You...I will sing praises to Your name..."* (v1,3,49). God has been a Rock for David and so four times this Psalm will call God a Rock (v2 twice, and v31, 46). The psalm takes into consideration all of the imagery of a rock in describing the faithfulness of God. He is a shelter, a stronghold, and a firm foundation for all who build on Him.

YHWH the Dangerous Deliverer (Sections 2 and 5) – In vv 4-19 David recalls the many times that deadly enemies surrounded him and how God came to his rescue. What is most impressive is how God is described as coming. The earth shakes, mountains quake, smoke, fire and coals are kindled. There is darkness and thick clouds, and then the brightness of lightning and the explosions of thunder. Earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, twisters and violent storms are the choice poetic phrases to describe God's response, His tone, His strength, and His glory. This is how God comes and delivers us from "our strong enemy" (v17). What's the point? We see God's omnipotent power in His ability to care for His people and His absolute and often secret sovereignty in how and why He does what He does when He does it. Who can control a storm? This is used to describe our deliverance; it doesn't often look the way we might script it. Nevertheless, *"He delivered me because He delighted in me"* (v19). This is what David understands at the end of his own journey – God was delighting in him.

In vv30-45 the deliverance is described again but this time in terms of God providing, preparing and leading His servant into a battle for victory. He places David in the strong places. He prepares him for war. As in Ephesians 6, God provides him with armor, defensive and offensive. And the result is that in YHWH he is able to overtake, turn back and rout his enemies. In fact, the result is that the warrior becomes the king and head over nations – his victory is far greater than he could ever imagine (vv43-45). Paul would praise the victorious work of Jesus in the church as a work *"exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us"* (Eph 3:20). God cannot be contained.

Sharing in YHWH's Victory (Sections 3 and 4) – In what can appear to be chaos or broad brush-strokes of God's catastrophic actions, there is no collateral damage in God's economy. Every hair on every head is numbered and God deals with each of us in every circumstance perfectly and to His glory. Vv20-24 sound much like Psalm 17; David is righteous in real time. He is honestly devoted to YHWH hiding nothing. He is not perfect, but his conscience is clean before God and before his enemies. In vv25-29 we see that God is not mocked by anyone and that a man reaps what he sows. How we present ourselves affects how we see and understand God. And when we see by faith the work of God powerfully working on our behalf, that faith humbles us; it does not make us proud. This kind of humble confidence allows us to say with the psalm-singer and with Paul in Philippians, *"I can all things through Christ who strengthens me"* (Phil 4:13).

David, Christ, and Their Descendants (v49, Rom 15:8-12) – This is a psalm of David's life, but we are instructed to see it as a psalm of the life of David's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ as well. This is the victory accomplished in Jesus Christ. But here is the kicker: it is the victory accomplished for all those in Jesus Christ as well.

David's life was full of trial, suffering, failings and triumphs. At the end of his life, David can see God's hand in all of it with great hope for all his descendants. Christ's life was full of trial, suffering, apparent defeats and obvious triumphs. At the end of His life, the Risen Christ declares God's sovereign rule over all heaven and earth with great hope for His descendants. We are the church; the sons of David by faith, the followers of Jesus by grace. We see a history full of trial, suffering, failings and triumphs. God answers our cries for deliverance, but He does so like a thundercloud, like a storm out of our control. What should we learn? Where is it all going? Where is everything in my life headed? What is the destination of the church in this age? This psalm tells us.

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