

Psalm 18 – Week of September 3

Memory Verse:

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. Psalm 18.2

This month our psalm devotions are centered on the theme “strengthen my faith.” When we talk about faith, it is important that we understand exactly what we are referencing. As Christians, we say, “Put your faith in Jesus.” In that context, faith is the active response to the gospel whereby we turn from our sin and self to Christ trusting in him alone for salvation. At the same time, we use the word faith to describe a general trust, reliance, confidence, hope in God not as a response to the saving work of Christ, but as a general disposition or attitude that we have when facing the uncertainties of this life. As you have encountered difficult or unsettling times in your life, perhaps someone has genuinely advised you, “You just need to have faith.” This is the “type” of faith we address in the psalms this month.

Certainly, all of us want to “strengthen our faith.” We want to live with a deep, abiding trust and confidence in God and his Word. But, what can do we to bolster and fortify our faith? According to Psalm 18, our faith is strengthened for the future when we take into consideration God’s faithfulness in the past and God’s eternal, unchanging nature.

In the title of the psalm, we learn that David wrote this particular hymn after God rescued him from the hand of Saul and all his enemies. As David’s life neared its end, 2 Samuel 22 records a similar version of this particular psalm. From the day of deliverance to the dawning of his death, David never stopped recalling God’s faithful working in David’s life. Hengstenberg calls the psalm “a great hallelujah, with which David retired from the theatre of life....In it the Psalmist thanks God, not for any single deliverance, but has throughout before his eyes, a great whole of gracious administrations, an entire life rich with the experiences of the loving-kindness of God.”

How did David see God’s faithfulness to him? In verses 4-19, he recalls God’s faithfulness in delivering him from the pit of peril...cords of death and torrents of destruction (vs4). David does not consider specific ways God delivered him. Instead, David sees in all God’s saving actions the sheer power and majesty of God. David also remembers God’s faithfulness in keeping him on a path of morality and personal integrity (vs. 20-28). In verse 21, he says, “For I have kept the ways of the LORD and have not wickedly departed from my God.” Is this the prideful boasting of a self-righteous man? Has David forgotten the sexual immorality and murder of his past? No. David is not claiming self-righteousness. He knows that it is God who lights “my lamp; the LORD God lightens my darkness.” Any success David experienced in his pursuit of personal holiness resulted from the grace of the God who saves “a humble people” (vs27). Finally, as David reminisces on God’s faithfulness, he remembers God’s help during the turbulent times of his kingship (vs.29-45). On the battlefield and in the chamber, God granted strength to David.

In summarizing this psalm, Charles Spurgeon writes that as David “reviewed his own remarkable history [he] observed the gracious hand of God in it all.” When you review the history of your life (no matter how short or long your days), do you see the gracious hand of God? Do you recognize ways in which God has delivered, strengthened, upheld you, blessed you? Can you trace the thread of God’s merciful providence weaving together your story? Reflecting on the faithfulness of God in our lives fortifies our faith in God as we face the unknown.

Ultimately, David acknowledges that all God has done for him is a result of who God is. In the first three verses David exalts God “my strength,” “my rock,” “my fortress,” “my deliverer,” “my God,” “my shield,” “my horn of salvation,” “my stronghold.” God revealed himself to David in these ways both in God’s character and in God’s actions. What God does always flows out of who God is. Because God is strength, rock, fortress, deliverer, shield, horn of salvation, stronghold, David was delivered from his enemies, exalted above those who rose against him and rescued from the man of violence (vs48).

Strengthening our faith involves both recalling God’s gracious actions in our personal history AND remembering who God is. Calvin writes, “Let us learn to apply to our own use those titles which are here ascribed to God, and to apply them as an antidote against all the perplexities and distresses which may assail us.” What perplexities and distresses are assailing you today? Doubt? Anxiety? Sickness? Discouragement? Conflict with peers or co-workers or family? Grief? Do you feel your faith is weak? Is it buckling under the weight of this worrisome world? Christian, remember who God is. And, apply these glorious names to every problem you face today. Are you weak? He is your strength. Are you anxious? He is your rock. Are you struggling with sin? He is your deliverer. Are you troubled? He is your refuge.

As you and I face a frightening and uncertain world, we need a strong faith. But, this faith is not produced or manufactured through the power of positive thinking, denying reality or focusing on ourselves. This faith which is a gift of God is fortified by recalling God’s past faithfulness and resting in who God is. When we focus our hearts on these truths with David we can say, “I love you, O LORD, my strength” (vs1).

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