

Psalms 18-11-29b

Let's resume our study now in Psalm 18. We have seen the first section here, David addressing himself to the Lord as the Rock of Israel in verses 1 through 3, first addressing him personally and then turning to the assembly and describing in greater detail God as his strength. What kind of strength is it? It is strength to clearly observe the situation.

This is standing on the crag. We need strength for this. We need objectivity, don't we? We need to see things as they are, not blown out of proportion, not reduced in an absurd way so that it catches us by surprise.

We need accurate intelligence. We need accurate observation and God provides that. He is the crag on which David can stand and without fear of attack, see what's going on.

He is the fortress. There is protection. There is safety.

And he is the deliverer. And when it moves from metaphor to deliverer, it changes from what God does to who God is. It's personal.

He is the Savior. He is the one who sets free, who removes from threat to a place of security and a place of safety and a place of peace. So what God does and who God is, his actions and his person.

And these are wonderful truths to stabilize us when we are faced with uncertainty, when we are faced with fear, when circumstances take a turn, events move in a way that terrifies us and we feel the pangs of death near at hand, the sorrows of death compass us about and we're threatened. We have difficulty maintaining our peace. Joy is out the window.

Where do we turn? You can't pursue joy. You can't pursue stimulation or distraction or sublimation. Where do you go? You go to the rock.

I will go to the rock that is higher than I. That's where we get the facts. That's where we have the security. That's where we have the safety.

And when we cry out to God our Deliverer, our Rock, our Fortress, our Shield, our Magain, David says, in my distress I called upon the Lord and cried out to my God. He heard my voice from his temple. Now how does David know this? Is he in heaven near the temple? Does he watch his voice enter through the Eastern Gate, move through the Holy Place into the Holy of Holies in the Heavenly Temple where God's throne is? How does he know his voice entered? How does he know his voice reached God's ears? He's a man of faith and God has promised, Psalm 55, 17, Evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud and he will hear my voice.

Why? Because I have ensured that there are no obstructions. If you've got a nice tight house such as the one we enjoy now up on the side of the hill, if you shut the door with all of that

insulation and these double-pane high-vacuum low-e windows and the rest of it, things can go on outside and you just don't hear it. Something is insulating.

Something is keeping sound from passing through. I can always tell, even if the window is open, a crack. Sometimes you just haven't flipped the little flippers that really seated in the sill.

And I hear chickens and I hear crickets and I hear outdoor sounds and I think, what is that? And I go over and it's just a fraction. Any unconfessed sin, any unresolved issue between us and the Lord in heaven can interfere with our prayers. What did Jesus say? If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

Jesus said, if you have not forgiven others, you are not forgiven. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. If I have not resolved, absolved, let go, washed away in my mind, buried and forgotten about insults, harms, wrongs in the near past or in the distant past, if I regard that in my heart, if it comes up, if I have a black mark against somebody's name and person and any time I'm near them, around them, hear of them, something dark arises in my soul, guess what? You can't call upon the Lord and expect Him to hear you.

You're done. You think, but I'm right, I'm justified, I was wronged. Do you think the Lord Jesus was wronged? Do you think you were wronged as much as He was wronged? Have you borne the sins of the entire world in your body on the tree and yet looked out on the ones inflicting the punishment and saying, Father, forgive them? They don't know what they're doing.

They're ignorant. Now, they're accountable and responsible for that ignorance, but they truly did not know. They didn't believe.

And because they didn't believe, they didn't know. What we don't believe, we don't know. What we don't implement, what we don't obey, we don't really know.

It is not epinosis in our soul. It's not experiential, practical, workout in daily life knowledge. We just don't know it.

And to the extent that we fail to forgive, to the extent that we fail to request and receive forgiveness from God for what we have done, acknowledge our sins, 1 John 1.9, 1 John 1.7, walk in the light, enjoy fellowship. That's how the blood of Jesus Christ keeps on cleansing us from sin. If we're not cleansed of sin, don't listen to the rest of this psalm.

It does not apply to us. You have to be qualified. You have to love the Lord.

That's how the psalm begins. Love is active. Love requires effort.

Love requires thought. Love requires concentration. You have to be thinking about the other person to love them.

Got to get inside their head. How do they feel? What's their view? How can I do something that pleases them? How can I be what pleases them? And certainly, and exponentially more so when

it comes to God. So, David says, In my distress I called upon the Lord, he heard my voice.

When I cried out to my God, my cry came before him right to his ears. No impediment. Nothing stopping it.

Right straight from David's lips to God's ears. Have you heard Jewish people say this? From your lips to God's ears? You know, may it be so? Well, for David, it was a literal truth. He cried out to God and God heard him.

Wherever heaven is, however dimensionally distant it is, our prayers, thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ now especially, go straight before the throne of grace. So what happened? Verse 7. Then the earth shook and trembled. The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken because he was angry.

Smoke went up from his nostrils and devouring fire from his mouth. Coals were kindled by it. Now, why is this? God doesn't say, hmm, David seems to be having some trouble.

What happens when David's prayer reaches God's ears? There is an earthquake. There is shaking of hills and mountains at the anger of the Lord. Now, why is God angry? Because sin, injustice, Belial is assaulting David.

David is being discomfited, as they used to say. He's being made fearful, made afraid. There is death as a threat.

There is a yawning chasm of darkness surrounding him. He can't maintain his peace, can't maintain his joy. He's not in a position to spend time praising the Lord and appreciating the Lord and serving the Lord because he is under attack.

And all of this martial language of fortresses and outposts and reconnaissance and needing to be secured from active harm. God is angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils, devouring fire from his mouth.

Now, literal or metaphorical? This is a metaphor. I wonder, before the days of tobacco and all of that, how did the idea of smoke coming out of the nostrils ever arise? Smoke from the nostrils. I mean, think about this.

I've seen somebody inhale a cigarette and blow it out of their nostrils, smoke coming out of the nostrils. But in the ancient day, people didn't smoke. So, what did this speak of? Fire inside your head? Why would fire come out your mouth and smoke come out your nose? What does this indicate? This is burning wrath.

This is combustible fury inside manifesting itself outwardly, right? That's the idea. This is the wrath of God and a devouring fire. When God gets angry, things are going to get destroyed.

It's a righteous anger. It's a holy anger. It is a purifying anger.

God doesn't burn down the righteous. He doesn't destroy obedient people. What gets lit on fire? What gets turned into coals? Sons of Belial.

Those who are operating in evil, in selfishness, in self-centeredness, in godlessness. Notice where the temple is if there's any doubt. When David's voice reached God's ears, where is God coming from in verse 9? He bowed the heavens also and came down.

This is the heavenly temple that God leaves with darkness under his feet. In the New Testament, you have some language from Paul. He must reign until he has put all things under his feet.

As yet, we do not see all things put under his feet. There is coming a day when all things will be under his feet except the Father, to whom everything is subordinate. What does under the feet mean? When God leaves heaven, when he bows the heavens, he bends the heavens and comes down and his feet hit the earth, what's under his feet? Darkness.

How are the principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age characterized? Darkness. Darkness of this age. The mere appearance of God crushes darkness under his feet.

Darkness cannot prevail where God is present. Got darkness in your soul? Got darkness in your thoughts? How do you dispel it? How do you drive it out? Darkness cannot prevail, darkness cannot remain in the presence of God. When God comes, the darkness gets mashed under his feet.

What happens to the feet of the Lord when he crushes Satan? Think about Genesis 3. What happens with the feet of the Lord Jesus? See, to the woman, he's going to crush the head of the serpent, but it costs him a bruise to his heel, doesn't it? There is a cost to crushing this darkness. God bows the heavens also and comes down with darkness under his feet. So above his feet, there is brightness.

He rides upon a cherub and flew. How does David know what a cherub is? Is there a temple with cherubim woven into the curtains? Is there a tabernacle with cherubim woven into the curtains? How does David even know what a cherub is? How does he know to mention a cherub? How does he know? Does he know anything about the Ark of the Covenant? He's got two of them on the mercy seat, right? With their wings. But he knows the word of God, doesn't he? The one who has my words and keeps them.

To keep them, you've got to have them. David knows his existing scriptures, doesn't he? He's heard Genesis. He knows about the cherub that was posted at the gate of the garden.

He knows about the cherubim that were woven into the curtains, even though he hasn't seen them. They've long tattered and blown away with time. Nothing left of the old tabernacle, pretty much, but the Ark in Samuel's day.

How does he know about the cherubim? He knows the word of God. He's heard it. He's heard it

read.

He's heard it taught. He knows the history of his people. He knows the history going all the way back to Genesis.

He rode upon a cherub and flew. He flew upon the wings of the wind. What does this speak of metaphorically? What does it mean that God flies on the wings of the wind? This is supernatural power, supernatural movement.

Man can't fly in these days, still can't fly unaided. But if God rides on a cherub, if he's flying on the wings of the wind, he's got a power beyond anything seen on earth, beyond anything man can comprehend. God has heard David's prayer.

God is angry. And God is shaking the very foundations that everyone relies on on earth for stability. You think, well, the hill, nobody can move a hill.

Nobody can move a mountain. Nobody can shake the surface of the earth. Well, God can and God does.

Nobody can fly on the wings of the wind. Nobody can use a cherub for transportation. Well, God can.

How often do we fail to account for God's supernatural power in our lives? We say, well, the days of miracles and the supernatural are long behind us, centuries ago. No, they're not. The material miracle may not take place, but we still love and serve a supernatural God.

And what may seem impossible to man, for God, is possible. With God, all things are possible. If any man be in Christ, he's a new creation.

Old things are passed away. Everything is new. You've got the God of the universe, the creator God in heaven, listening and responding to your prayers, if.

If what? If there's no impediment to your voice reaching all the way to his ears in the throne room. It's a big if. My son, if you receive my words, if you hide my commandments with thee, if you incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding, if you lift up your voice, if you cry out, if you seek it as silver and search for it as for hid treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

And when you have that, and you love the Lord, and you live in the light of that wisdom and that truth, your voice goes straight to the throne room. People say, I wonder why my prayers don't seem to be heard. Well, maybe you got all the windows shut.

Maybe there's something in the way. Because it is a promise of God, and his arm is not shortened that he can't deliver, and his ear is not heavy that he can't hear. If there's some sort of an upward communication problem, it's not on the Lord's half of the transmission.

It's ours. David has this confidence, and God responds. Notice, he makes darkness his secret place.

His canopy around him is dark waters. Now, this is fascinating to me. I thought God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

I thought he's coming down from heaven, and he's mashing darkness under his feet. So why is he making darkness his secret place, and why is his canopy dark waters and thick sky clouds? This is a fascinating thing. To the observing eye, what is seen? Darkness? Clouds? Can't tell what's going on? Looks very bleak and very dark? But what's inside? What's inside the darkness? What's behind the canopy of cloud? The presence of God.

We think that darkness is a discouragement. We think that thick clouds and dark waters are a threat. God says, I wrapped myself in that stuff.

You stand still, brave the dark waters, brave the clouds. You're going to find that I'm inside. You can't get to him except through the dark waters, except through the clouds of the skies.

You see this in Job. You get to the latter chapters, and God appears in the storm cloud. A storm always creates a threatening appearance.

Some people enjoy a good storm. I think a lot of us enjoy a good storm. You walk out and you see the thing coming, the big thunderheads, and there's lightning, and there's thunder, and you can see the rain falling on somebody else that's miles away.

And you say, wow, that's fantastic. But as it blows rapidly toward you, you begin to say, seek shelter, find a place of safety. This thing could hurt me.

This could blow away all my possessions. But for the child of God, there is no fear in the cloud. There is no fear in the dark waters.

Why? It's not the shadows of Sheol. It's not the threat of Belial. It is the dark cloak in which God has wrapped himself.

And you're experiencing those because He's near, because He's imminent, because He's close at hand. Darkness is His secret place. He's inside the darkness.

His canopy around Him is dark waters. He's in there. It's not a threat.

It's a promise. And look at verse 12. From the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire.

This is most closely described by the eye of a hurricane. As a hurricane approaches, it's dark waters and thick clouds and all kinds of destruction, whirling winds. But when you get into the center, that's light and calm.

Many times there's sunshine shining down through the center of the hurricane. And that's what's going on here. After the canopy and dark waters and thick clouds of the skies, the brightness, the thick clouds pass with hailstones and coals of fire.

And inside is the brightness of God. If you're not dismayed, if you're not discouraged, if you don't shut your eyes and turn your head in the storm, you're going to see God. Do you remember when Moses was requesting to see God's glory? And God said, you know, if you looked at me, I'd kill you.

But I will pass by and I'll put my hand over you and destruction will pass by. But then I'll remove my hand and you can see me after. So after what seems like a terrible threat, that's when you get a glimpse of God's glory.

And it's counterintuitive. It doesn't make sense to the human mind that in discouragement, in destruction and in darkness is where we are going to find the brightness of God. We just have to stick.

We have to trust. We have to keep our eyes open. His thick clouds, verse 12, pass with hailstones and coals of fire.

Hailstones. This is what God used to destroy the enemies before Joshua. Remember when they turned in across the land and then they started the southern campaign? There was fire and brimstone and hailstones from heaven destroying the enemies.

We have nothing to fear from God's hailstones. Israelites weren't killed by them. His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire.

The Lord thundered from heaven and the Most High uttered his voice, hailstones and coals of fire. Once again, it's repeated. People are typically terrified by these things.

But for David, this is the relief from his terror. He cried out to God in terror of Sheol and Belial and the darkness of death, the shadow of death. Now God is speaking in hailstones and coals of fire.

Everybody else can be afraid, but I'm not afraid. That's my God talking. That's my Father in heaven responding to my plea.

He's here. That's Him. I am not afraid.

Bring on the fire. Bring on the hailstones. Why? Because He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them.

Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world were uncovered, at Your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils. Belial kind of shrinks into puny insignificance here. God is shaking the world.

God is moving the seas and exposing the Mariana Trench. He's the channels of the sea. The bottom of the ocean is exposed.

God can do whatever He wants with the physics of the planet at His rebuke, the blast of the breath of His nostrils. What kind of breath is it? This is fire and smoke, right? He's breathing fire. And what does He do? David is not destroyed.

He's not consumed in this. He sent from above. He took me.

He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. But they're obviously insignificantly weak and puny in the face of God's strength and God's presence.

They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. He also brought me out into a broad place. Why did He deliver me? Because He delighted in me.

What is it that they hurled at the Lord Jesus on the cross? You remember the phrase, let Him deliver Him if He delights in Him. And yet in the midst of that three hours of darkness and in the midst of the clouds and thunder of judgment, God's grace and God's mercy, the brightness of God's glory is revealed. It is through that darkness and through that judgment that God vindicates His Son, saves us, makes possible our eternal life.

But you don't get there without the cross. You don't get there without the darkness and without the challenge. What is it that carries us through the dark times and the dark places and the discouragements and the sorrows and the enemies? The forces of Belial.

What delivers us? I love you, O Lord, my strength. And I express that love in faith and obedience. And because of that, I have confidence that my darkness is going to be turned to deliverance.

And the clouds and the dark waters are going to be nothing more than harbingers of your arrival and your presence. They always say, you know, it's darkest right before the dawn. Well, David says, when you see the really big darkness and the hailstones and the lightning and the thunder, stand by, your God is near.

He's never closer than when things seem to be at their worst. He is in the midst of the maelstrom. And look at verse 20.

This is where we'll be going next time. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands, he has recompensed me. Think about cleanness of hands.

Patty and I just spent about an hour scrubbing paint off our hands before class tonight. I have clean hands. Have they always been clean? Matt Bauhaus and I worked on a car and my hands were black.

Seemingly forever black, black down inside the fingernails, black under and in the cracks and crevices and wounds and so on. But my hands are clean now. Clean hands doesn't mean they've never been dirty.

Clean hands means they have been cleansed, right? We have to go to the blood of Jesus Christ, his son that cleanses us from all sin. How does that happen? You might think 1 John 1.9. I like 1 John 1.7. If we keep on walking in the light as he keeps on being in the light, we keep on having fellowship. They are all durative present tenses.

We keep on walking. He keeps on being in the light. We keep on having fellowship and the blood of Jesus Christ, his son keeps on cleansing us from all sin.

Part of that is acknowledgement and confession and you have that in 1.9. But it is the walking in the light, recognizing that he's in the light. But many times that light is wrapped in darkness and wrapped in hailstones and fury. Just have to trust, wait for that to pass.

The light is inside, the fortress, the rock, the security, the safety, the deliverer is inside. And that fury and that storm is going to descend on those who have no protection and wipe them out. Well, we'll pick up here in Psalm 18 verse 20 next time.

And we're going to see that this multi-part psalm has multiple messages for us, multiple points of application. We've seen a couple of them tonight. We'll see more next time.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we do thank you for your grace and the faithfulness that you exhibit toward us. You've made a way for us to be cleansed, to be qualified in your sight, to approach your throne, to have our voice heard.

And we know that we owe these things to your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, his love for us and his faithfulness unto death in accomplishing your plan and purpose for us. We thank you for your Holy Spirit. We pray that he will bring these truths to our minds and enable us to see their pertinence and their application in the hours and the days ahead.

We pray that we can take full advantage of this wonderful potential and this great gift that the Lord Jesus has given to us, even as his father, David, transmitted it to him across the span of the centuries. And we pray that we can live in that light and be pleasing in your sight. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.