

Psalms 18-12-06a

Good evening, this is Thursday, the 6th of December, 2018. We continue our study of the Psalms tonight, looking at Psalm 18. We began it last week, we hope to finish it tonight.

Let's take a moment at the beginning, as we usually do, to focus our attention, set aside the things that tend to crowd into our minds and obfuscate the things we're trying to see in God's Word, and ask God's blessing on our fellowship. Shall we pray? Father, we're so grateful for your cleansing grace. We both inadvertently and verterntly are subject to the corruption in our nature, the corruption that is in the world, and as we move through it, we find that we need forgiveness, we need to forgive each other, and we need your forgiveness first and foremost, so that we can be purified, we can be cleansed, we can be sanctified for service and for function before your throne.

We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, who has made this possible on our behalf, and has set an example for us of love and faith and obedience. And we ask that tonight, as we examine this portion of your Word together, that your Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts, that it will find receptive soil and be implanted deeply within us to bear its fruit, to encourage us, to strengthen us, and to give us perspective as we face what remains to us of this life, and anticipate the life that is to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, we are looking at Psalm 18, and one of the best ways to look at a psalm is to read it. This is a rather lengthy psalm. It has 50 verses in it.

So rather than re-read it, what I'd like to do is remind you of the outline I gave you last time. One of the reasons we prevailed through the outline, the chiasitic structure, is to try to deal with the length of this psalm and to not lose sight of its content. So you'll remember that the first three verses talk about the Lord, Yahweh, the Tetragrammaton in Hebrew, God's personal covenant name to Israel, and presents Him as the rock.

I will love you, O Lord, my strength. And that is the theme and the summary of this psalm. I will love you, O Lord, you are my strength.

And there is reciprocity, there is give and take in the relationship that we have with God as we love Him and express that love in faith and obedience. God is our strength. God is our deliverance.

God is the guide, the beginning and the end, the very definition that makes our lives meaningful and directional, fruitful. I will love you, O Lord, my strength. That's the theme.

So often we can be distracted, so often we can be deflected, we can be dragged down into the muck of the world by people, by the news, by the internet, by Lord only knows what may be assaulting us on any given day. And it is good to stop and remember that we are related by covenant to the Creator God, the God who loves us personally and individually as well as

collectively, and He is our strength. It defines us.

This is who we are. People keep trying to figure out who they are or where they are. There was a sign in the antique store the other day that was behind the register and it said something, I'm paraphrasing loosely, but I'm lost and I'm going to go find myself.

If I get back before I return, ask me to wait and I'll check back with you later. But there's, especially I think in the younger generations now and all along, but never more so than in the present, there is a real search for meaning in life. The more that materialism and secular humanism prevail as philosophical context for education and for the news and trying to interpret world events, the more individuals tend to get lost in the sense of not really knowing what their purpose is, what they should be striving for or pushing for.

Is it simply prosperity? Is it simply success in employment or success in relationship? We have such a tremendous gift from the Lord Jesus Christ. We know exactly who we are. We know exactly why we're here and we know exactly what we are supposed to be doing.

And it's not a matter of a search. It's a matter of a pursuit. It is striving for excellence in a very well-defined mission.

And David had that same thing and he expresses it here. I will love you, O Lord, my strength. And that really summarizes the first three verses.

The God who is my strength, the God in whom I trust, my fortress, my deliverer, my rock. That was section A, if you remember. This psalm has got nine sections, four moving in toward the center, four moving back out, one right in the center.

It is an eight plus one psalm. And to succinctly view these verses, it's helpful to just look at the sections. Verses 1 through 3, the Lord, the rock of Israel.

Second, verses 4 through 6, talks about affliction. Wouldn't it be great if we just all went straight to the peaceable kingdom? As soon as you get saved, there's some sort of ejection seat button that gets pressed and you are catapulted directly into the kingdom of the Father. We think that would be great, but it wouldn't because we would get there acutely ignorant of what to do.

We would get there with no training and no experience. And if you've ever suddenly been handed a task or a job or been put in a position for which you have no training and experience, then you'll know exactly why that's not a good thing. You want to be prepared.

You want to feel like you've been given an assignment that you can sink your teeth into and carry across the finish line in a happy and gratifying fashion for all concerned. So 4 through 6, affliction. We are afflicted in this life.

We don't get to exit out. We're not delivered out of every trial. We're not traveling flowery beds of ease, as the hymn says.

Am I a soldier of the cross or am I trying to find a flowery bed of ease to go lay on? That's 4 through 6. Then 7 through 15, this is God coming to help and we're going to see a little bit more about that tonight as we move into the center portion of the psalm, the Lord's deliverance. He comes to help in 7 through 15 and then he delivers, having arrived in verses 16 through 19. This brings you to the center of the psalm, the point, the central element of the chiasm here which is verses 20 through 29.

God is faithful to those who are faithful. Those who pursue righteousness, God shows himself righteous. Those who are faithful, God shows himself faithful.

And it's the theme, how is God my strength? Why is he my rock? Because I have availed myself of the opportunity to lay hold of his righteousness, to be faithful to him, to be obedient to him, and as a consequence, he is faithful and delivers me. That's at the center, verses 20 through 29. Then you come back out on the backside of the chiasm and in verses 30 through 36, corresponding to the Lord's deliverance up above in verses 16 through 19, you have the perfection of God.

Why does God deliver? How does God deliver? How does he prevail? Why does he prevail? Because he is perfect. He possesses characteristics and elements that are the great unlike, the great beyond, the great other. Nothing can prevail against God because he is the ultimate in perfection.

That's verses 30 through 36, the divine perfections. Coming a little further out now, corresponding to the Lord's coming to help, in verses 7 through 15, we have the king, the earthly king, reflecting when God comes to help, this enables the king to prevail. And so you have this in verses 37 through 42.

Corresponding to the listing of affliction in 4 through 6, you have deliverance from affliction in verses 43 through 45. And then finally, Yahweh, the rock of deliverance, the Lord is the rock of Israel, verses 46 through 50. So it's a beautiful symmetry.

You see God entering into a situation and providing deliverance for the faithful, and as a result on the way out, you see that God's perfection and God's deliverance imbues his servants and his faithful ones, his king, with the ability to prevail and to be victorious over the forces of darkness, the forces of the enemy. It is a glorious salvation. It is a glorious deliverance.

And you return to the source, the rock of Israel, the Lord God. This of course has messianic overtones, and we're going to see this explicitly. These are the kinds of Psalms that the Lord Jesus processed in his human soul and understood not just what he was going to do as the Savior, but how he was going to do it, in what strength, thinking what thoughts, acting on what guidance, implementing what skills.

His father, David, transferred that in the same way that we as parents and grandparents long to transmit values and doctrinal truths and biblical concepts to our children and grandchildren. If

you saw the presidential funeral this past week, you saw one of the last of the representatives of the greatest generation being eulogized, and the values and the perspective and the sources of strength that fueled so many in that generation, of which President Bush 41 was a representative, are something that it seems has been very difficult to bring forward to subsequent generations and to imbue those values in the youth as they come up. And one of the reasons is that so much of it was in the fabric of Christian values and Christian faith that colored and characterized so much of the culture of that day.

And when you subtract God and you subtract his word and the values from his word that were respected even by those who were not Christians or not strong Christians, you take away the source, it's like switching off a light bulb. The light that emanates from the bulb is going to quickly fade. And there's certainly an element of that in the deterioration that we see in character and in culture and in sustainable virtues.

In our society and our culture today, people are virtuous when it's easy. They're not virtuous if there's much of a challenge to it. Earlier generations going back many, many decades in this country rose to a challenge.

Challenges seem to crush and grind us in these days. And people are looking to shift blame. They're looking for an out.

They're looking for a pill to take or a therapy or an excuse. Of course, speaking in generalities, there's many wonderful exceptions, but the exceptions are increasingly few. Increasingly few.

So this is what David addresses here. What is the source of strength? What is the source of deliverance? What is the source of prevailing and being victorious over seemingly insurmountable challenges? It is God and only God. Well, we got about halfway through the psalm last time.

We made it up through verse 19, if you'll recall, because that was the end of the first four sections. The rock of Israel, affliction, the Lord's coming to help, which is a very interesting description in 7-15, riding on the cherub with the darkness and the clouds, bowing the heavens down, darkness and a canopy of dark waters and thick clouds. There's brightness before him and thick clouds pass with hailstones and coals of fire.

Hailstones and coals of fire are one of the signs of the movement of God, the coming of God. And you see this throughout the Bible from Exodus to Job to the Revelation. When the presence of God begins to be manifest in the earth, there are powerful weather and seismic effects that mark that coming, that eruption into human history.

It says in verse 13, the Lord thundered from heaven and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire mentioned again. He sent out His arrows, this is lightning bolts, scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance and He vanquished them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, the foundations of the world are uncovered at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast

of the breath of your nostrils.

And what you see here is the effects of earthquake. Verse 7, the earth shook and trembled, the foundations of the hills quaked and were shaken at God's wrath. I want to talk for just a minute and invite you to review in your own mind earthquakes in the Bible.

If you'd like a little self-quiz, what's the first earthquake you can think of in Scripture? Earthquakes in the Bible, great earthquakes of the Bible, we could call it. A little mini-study here. You know, they talk about great figures in the Reformation or great prophets of the Old Testament.

How about great earthquakes of the Bible? Well, depending on how well you understand descriptions, you actually have the first earthquake during creation week. You think about day 3 when the waters of the earth are collected in one place and the dry land appears. I suspect there was seismic activity involved in that, great movements of huge amounts of earth's crust.

This would be earthquake-age on a colossal scale. You know, this is back in Genesis 1 verses 9 and 10. The dry land appears and is gathered in one place.

This is uplift and shearing forces and all kinds of rearrangement of the earth's surface. This is also mentioned in other recountings of creation such as Job chapter 38 verses 4 through 7 and Psalm 148, the first six verses, talks about the earth and the disturbances that took place when God created the earth. We've got mountains that are a couple of thousand feet above sea level.

We've got deep crevasses under the ocean that go 13,000 feet below sea level. Something had to rearrange all of that ground. So this is the activity of God and you can only imagine that that's probably the record for rearranging the earth's surface.

We also know that in Genesis chapter 6 when the fountains of the deep were broken up for the flood in Noah's day, that the Genesis 7.11 for example, this would have involved earthquakes of unimaginable proportions to cleave the ground. You find this Hebrew verb *bakah* that means to split or to crack open was used here. Of course you've got a 14 month long wait before the waters disperse enough for Noah's ark to be opened and for them to exit.

Probably the first one you might think of without those almost epic level earthquakes would be in Genesis chapter 19. If you remember the career of Abram begins in Genesis 12. You have Lot, you have Sodom, you have Gomorrah and in Genesis 19 what happens? Not only is there fire and brimstone from heaven, but there is a great earthquake.

It is the overthrow of the five cities of the plain, only one of which survives to any extent and that's Zoar. That's the one that Lot and his two daughters attempt to flee to and that city has survived down almost to the present day. It is called Safi and if you figure that had to be within say a day's walk of Sodom that gives you aid in figuring out where Sodom was.

But think about it now, we've talked about three big earthquakes, how prominent is God's

presence and God's involvement in those three episodes? Well Creation Week goes without saying, God is speaking the earth and the current environment into existence. You think about the flood, God comes down to see that the imagination of men's hearts is only evil all the day and He pronounces judgment and He sends the flood. He shuts the door on the ark, God is personally present.

You think about Sodom and Gomorrah, God walks with Abram and says, shall I hide from Abram the thing I'm about to do? God is personally present in all three of these, isn't He? So we begin to see that there is a correspondence between the personal presence of God and the earth moving. The fourth notable earthquake in Scripture is Exodus 19. You have Genesis 19 and then Exodus 19.

If you remember the layout of the book of Exodus, you're at Mount Sinai and there is a great shaking of the mountain before God delivers the Ten Commandments and the remainder of the law to Moses. This bespeaks the presence of God. What else is there at Sinai? Remember there is cloud, there is lightning, there is thunder.

This is reviewed for example in Hebrews chapter 12 verses 18 through 21 where it says, you have not come to Mount Sinai quaking and smoking and the Israelites fleeing, running away, only Moses and Joshua going forward. But this is the presence of God. There are others that you could infer might have an earthquake involved, the rebellion of Korah where the ground opens up and swallows them, the fall of the walls of Jericho perhaps, the Philistines in the days of Saul and Jonathan were defeated at Geba in 1 Samuel chapter 14 and there was an earthquake in their camp and it causes great confusion.

Jonathan is armor bearer. That whole episode, once that battle begins in earnest there is an earthquake and this is a large part of the defeat of those Philistines. You have Elijah on Mount Horeb and just as Moses was in the presence of God with an earthquake and the giving of the law, you have the law and the prophets in Israel and so often they are spoken of together.

Jesus told the two on the road to Emmaus about how the law and the prophets all spoke of him. The law and all the prophets. Well you have the law being delivered with an earthquake and you have Elijah as the representative prophet just as Moses and Elijah share the Mount of Transfiguration with the Lord Jesus when Elijah goes to Mount Horeb, what happens? There is an earthquake, you remember? After that the still small voice, 1 Kings chapter 19.

A lot of these are in chapter 19 aren't they? Genesis 19, you got Exodus 19, now we got 1 Kings 19. Earthquakes. Here's one I suspect you would not remember because I didn't remember it and we've done this prophetic book together but Amos, the prophet Amos is largely concerned with the Day of the Lord in his prophetic book and in Amos chapter 5 verses 18 through 20 he talks about a great earthquake that is associated with the Day of the Lord.

Well in 750 B.C. in the days of Amos there was a huge earthquake. Remember in Isaiah's day when he said a virgin will conceive and bear a son and before he knows his right hand from his

left and the curd is in the way and the pica resin thing will dissolve and so on and there was a near-term fulfillment and then a long-term fulfillment of the Lord Jesus as spoken of in Matthew a virgin will conceive and bear a son and there it's a capital S son. But there was an immediate fulfillment and a far fulfillment.

Same thing in Amos' day. He prophesied about the Day of the Lord and about there being this tremendous earthquake over and over again. Amos 1-1, Amos 2-13, Amos 3-14-15, Amos 6-11, Amos 8-8, Amos 9-1-5 and pretty much all you have to do is just read the book of Amos and see that over and over again he's talking about the Day of the Lord and this tremendous upheaval.

Well, in 750 BC there was an enormous earthquake in the land and this is also referenced in Isaiah 2-10-21, in Isaiah 5-25 and in Micah 1-3-6, the Day of the Lord characterized. Now, I'm going somewhere with this, so don't let me lose you. What are we talking about? Earthquakes.

Why are we talking about earthquakes? What have we seen that is universal to them thus far? God's presence is associated with them, right? So when Amos is prophesying about the Day of the Lord and there's this ginormous earthquake, what do we expect on the Day of the Lord? God is going to impinge, God is going to appear, God is going to show up. Now we have an earthquake in Psalm 18 and yet this is David talking about the Lord's personal deliverance. So if you think about the span of your life, the span of your Christian life and the times when you have felt oppressed or depressed or challenged or up against it and you've cried out to the Lord, you've gone to Him in prayer, you've told Him that you're anxious to live a life of faith and obedience, but this is a really rough go.

Did you ever have an earthquake right after? I haven't asked some of you California dwellers, but I don't think that any earthquakes you've experienced really qualify as this kind of earthquake, do they? So why is David talking about an earthquake in this Psalm? This is what I'm asking myself. Isn't this over the top that there's going to be an earthquake when God comes to deliver because we're being faithful and obedient and saying, Lord I'm righteous before you, I'm a man of clean hands, I've kept short accounts, I've asked you to purge me with hyssop so that I can be clean and wash me and make me whiter than snow, I'm endeavoring to be faithful, I'm endeavoring to be obedient, I want to make a claim on your grace and your deliverance and your faithfulness to me like David does here, but David's talking about an earthquake. What am I going to see in an earthquake? When is God going to wrap himself in a canopy of clouds and cherubs and come thundering in with lightning and blasting everything in his path and there's a wave of brightness and then all of this thick darkness and then the unviewable glory of God is inside? I don't get deliverance on that order, so what is he talking about? This is the question we're going to answer for ourselves by looking at the rest of the Bible earthquakes, so are you with me? Amos says there's going to be one in the day of the Lord.

Now, after the law, so you've got creation, the flood, the law, the prophets, earthquakes, right? In the flow of history what's the next big earthquake you can think of? Crucifixion, right?

Earthquake. Earthquake is coming. Graves are opened.

How does the Lord get out of the tomb? What happens concomitantly with the stone being rolled away? There is another earthquake. What happens 50 odd days after that? In Acts, there's an earthquake. You almost get the idea seismologically speaking that there's the big earthquake at the crucifixion, there's an aftershock three days later at the resurrection and then there's a second aftershock seven weeks later at Pentecost, but the house shook and there continue to be earthquakes in Acts.

How does Peter get out of prison? Careful now. How does Peter get out of prison? Angel kicks him and all the bars open up. How does Paul get out of prison? Still a trick question.

Does Paul get out of prison? Everybody else gets out of prison, but he stays there and the Philippian jailer gets saved. Why? Because there's an earthquake and everybody leaves, but Paul does not. Acts 16.31. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house.

Earthquakes associated with the inception of the church age. God drawing near through Christ. Now, my favorite collection of earthquakes after the ones associated with the crucifixion and the resurrection in Acts 4.31 where you have the earthquake there shortly after the Pentecost and then you have Acts 16.

How about these earthquakes? We've studied them when we did the book of Revelation. What happens after all of the seals? When the first seal, second seal, third seal, all the way up to the sixth seal, seventh seal, what happens at the end? The great earthquake, right? Then you go back and you do the trumpets. That by the way is Revelation chapter 6. Then what? Trumpets, right? What happens after the seventh trumpet sounds? That's in Revelation 11.

The great earthquake. What happens after the bowls or the vials which is Revelation chapter 16? What happens? The great earthquake. Earthquake.

Why? Because when the seals and the trumpets and the bowls, what happens on earth? What happens in the angelic powers of the air and what happens in heaven with the bowls pouring down? Those are coterminous. We've studied it before and the great earthquake. What happens then? The Lord Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords rides in at Armageddon and all heaven breaks loose in there, right? Earthquake.

Now, I'm back to my question. What do you think? Why does David talk about God coming with these signs of tremendous divine presence? Thick clouds and hailstones. You have some of that in Job when you get toward the end after Elihu speaks.

Remember that? And the Lord appears and speaks out of the whirlwind. Thick clouds and darkness. But why does David invoke that? He writes this psalm after God has delivered him from his enemy's roundabout and from Saul.

Why does he invoke that? Sort of a double occasion. He got delivered from Saul first and eventually he's delivered in 1 Samuel 22 from all of his enemies roundabout. So, what's going on here? Let me put it a different way.

Let me put it the way the Apostle Peter puts it. How should we view our lives? When we are caught up in those challenges, when we're facing tests, when we're navigating difficulties and we say, where is the deliverance of the Lord? What is the deliverance to which we should be looking? And we saw this on Sunday in Corinthians. Why is the resurrection the heart of the gospel? What is the application value of that? So, the resurrection is the heart of the gospel.

How should we then live? Well, what am I facing this hour, this day, this week? How do I approach it? What is my perspective? My perspective is, I'm headed for resurrection. Which means what? What did Jesus preach in his 40 days of resurrection appearances? What was Paul preaching in his two year imprisonment in Rome? The kingdom. Resurrection isn't just to hang like a freeze or a baby mobile.

I remember for a while my mom had one of those. Have you ever seen those little brass baby angels with little trumpets and they hang on threads and sometimes there's a candle and it makes them spin like this. A little candle deal.

We had one for a while. They're just stamped out of sheet brass. But sometimes you'll see them over a baby's crib or you did when I was little.

Little cherubs, they call them. I think cherubs would be insulted. They're the mightiest angels God ever created.

Satan is a cherub. Gabriel and Michael are cherubs and cherubim. But I don't know, some kind of way, the Renaissance artists had these little naked babies flying around with little tiny wings.

Oh, my little cherub. But what is the notion of God's deliverance here with clouds and writing on the cherub and an earthquake and so on? A big part of our deliverance is not waiting for God to erupt into this circumstance and fix it right now. I've got a health issue.

I've got a financial issue. I've got a relationship issue. I've got a job issue.

I've got some circumstance that is really pressing me sore. I want God to come in and blow this thing away with his mighty power. What do we look to? In this world ye shall have tribulation.

Be of good cheer. There is a day coming when God is going to come with the cloud and the cherub, the voice of the archangel, the trump of God. The dead are going to rise.

The enemies are going to be slain. The blood is going to run as high as the horse's bridles. And in the same way that even though we are not delivered into perfection yet, we partake of our eternal life day by day.

We enjoy our salvation now even though we are not in the glorified state yet. We have a

preview now. We have peace that passes understanding.

We have a relationship with God. We have strength for the day and strength for the morrow. And we have gifts with which we can bless one another and be blessed by one another.

And it is a foretaste of glory divine. That song starts out blessed assurance. What is the blessed assurance? God is going to come.

David treats it as a fact. He spends six verses talking about how God is going to come and another several verses talking about what happens when God does come and it is all future. There is no record.

All of those biblical earthquakes we talked about, there is no record of David ever being delivered by an earthquake. No record of God ever appearing on David's behalf to quell the Philistines or stop Saul. Quite the opposite.

You have an evil spirit from the Lord pestering Saul. David plays music and he gets a measure of peace. Then he picks up his javelin and wings it at David.

But what is David saying here? A great deal of our deliverance now, in time, in circumstance, is the reality of God's future appearance. How real is the earthquake to us? How real is the thunder and the lightning and the cloud and the glory and the cherub and the final sorting of this world to us? To David it was so real it has already happened. How often does the Bible present God's actions this way? We have already been granted citizenship in heaven.

We already have an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled stored up for us. It is already there but we don't have it yet. So why does he talk about the earthquake? Because it is the presence of God.

God is outside of time. God is already there. There is a sense in which God has already done this because that is how certain it is.

But for us it is future. So with that perspective now, look at verse 16. After the channels of the sea are seen and the foundations of the world are uncovered, at the Lord's rebuke and at the blast of the breath of His nostrils, this is David looking across the valley of the shadow of death.

This is David looking to the horizon and seeing the action of God in prospect. It reminds you of the armies of God arranged on the hill. The Lord opened His eyes so that He can see the chariots and horsemen that are arranged.

Now what did those chariots and horsemen do on the day that the prophet and his servant looked at them? Did they win a victory? It is potential. It is power in reserve. It is power until the time is right.

Our confidence, our expectation that our covenant Lord God is going to appear and is going to vindicate and is going to melt the opposition and the evil and the force of darkness, whether it

is spiritual forces in the heavenly places or earthly human forces, God has got them marked. Remember the inkhorn angel that went out and marked the servants of God before the destruction? God knows them that are His. Jesus says, My sheep know Me.

They hear My voice. They come when I call them. Well, He hasn't called us yet, but we will know His voice.

Have you ever heard an ark angel shout? It is going to be real. It ought to sustain us. It ought to give us the strength that David talks about here.

Look at this in verse 16. He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters. That word for draw out is the word that you get Moses from.

Remember when the princess of Egypt named Moses? And why did she name him Moshe? Because I drew him out of the waters. Well, this is the verb. It is Moshe.

He Moshe'd me out of the waters, and it is intentional. It is a reminder that God has done this before. Look at the deliverance that He wrought when He brought Israel out of Egypt.

He not only drew Moses out of the water and raised him up for a purpose. Think about some of the remarks they made during the presidential funeral this week. Why was the president spared when he was shot down in World War II? He always felt that it was for a purpose, that God had a purpose for him.

God had a purpose in rescuing Moses and drawing him out of the waters. God had a purpose for Israel in rescuing them and drawing them out of many troubled waters, metaphorically speaking, delivering them across the troubled waters and drowning the Egyptians behind them. He drew me out of many waters.

He delivered me from my strong enemy. This is an already, not yet, idea. It is as good as it gets.

It is a good idea and it is done. Delivered me from those who hated me. They were too strong for me.

They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. He also brought me out into a broad place. He delivered me because He delighted in me.

And this had to be a comfort to the soul of the Lord Jesus when He reflected on the dark waters that He was traversing as He secured our salvation and bearing the sins of the world. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands. He has recompensed me for I have kept the ways of the Lord and have not wickedly departed from my God.

You remember we saw this a few Psalms back. Who is it that is qualified to dwell on the Lord's hill? I have not joined those who pour out libations to empty deities and to pointless pursuits. All His judgments are before me and I did not put away His statutes from me.

This is why you persist in Bible study. This is why you reflect on what you learn. This is why you think about it as you go to the Lord in prayer.

You recognize or you wouldn't be listening to the sound of my voice and the voices of others who have taught the Word of God that this is the key to relationship with God, listening to what He has to say. Somebody brings it up for us and we listen. I have kept the ways of the Lord.

I have not wickedly departed. How did I do that? His judgments are before me. I don't put away His statutes from me.

I was also blameless before Him and I kept myself from my iniquity. When we commit iniquity we break with it. We depart from it.

We avail ourselves of God's cleansing and God's grace to not only be cleansed, but to be separated from the Lord. We are separated from the Lord. Instead of our iniquity separating between us and our God, we go with God and are separated from our iniquities just as He is separate from them.

Therefore, verse 24, the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His sight. Do you notice the symmetry there between verse 20 and verse 24? Rewarded me according to my righteousness, recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His sight. Verse 21 and 23 correspond.

I have kept the ways of the Lord. I have not wickedly departed. Verse 23, I was blameless and I kept myself from iniquity.

And what's in the center there? Verse 22, His judgments are before me and I did not put away His statutes. It is the Word of the Lord that brings the power of God into our lives. How does the power of God come into the life of the believer? It is the Spirit of God and it is the Word of God.

Now, it is not enough to hear it. You can read James on this subject. Be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

How are you a doer of the Word? Well, it has got to be cycling through our thoughts. We have to be thinking, how does it pertain? How does it apply? What is the better path? What is the higher road? What would please God? What is the road of sacrificial to self and beneficial to others? What is the Christ-like way? What is the Holy Spirit leading me to do as I prayerfully consider my options? It is not always easy. Sometimes we are being led to do nothing.

Stand fast. Hold the fort. Wait until there is clear guidance.

One of the most difficult things to do is to wait and to not get jumpy, to not be impulsive, to not grasp at some passing straw. Sometimes it is just a matter of sitting by the brook, letting the ravens drop the food, and watching the water slowly sink and figuring, well, the Lord is going to

do something because I am either going to die of thirst or He is going to give me some instructions. And as Elijah watched that water level recede, he had to be thinking, well, one thing about this changing water level, it tells me that I am not going to be here forever.

But he did have to wait. He had to trust. He had to be patient.

Patience has a perfect work in us. It takes a lot of strength to be patient. With the merciful, verse 25, you will show yourself merciful.

With a blameless man, you will show yourself blameless. So what do we do when we are not in a position to take a new tack, make a new plan, go in a new direction? We don't seem to have a viable option at the moment. What do we do? Well, you can sit there and spin rapidly to no purpose, or you can focus on being blameless.

You can focus on being merciful. Those of us that had to wait a while before we met our right opposite number, some listening to me may still be doing that. You know, you could say, well, but I am lonely.

I want to meet somebody. I've got to have companionship now. And you could sign up for speed dating.

You could go to a table and talk to somebody for five minutes, and then they leave, and you know, round robin type of thing. What can you do? You can be patient. You can say, I want to concentrate on developing the qualities that God looks for in a godly man or a godly woman.

I want to be blameless. I want to be faithful. I want to be obedient.

I want to be merciful. How can I exhibit those qualities? How can I express those qualities? How can I cultivate those qualities? As I reflect on the Word of God, I reflect on the example of the Lord Jesus, the guidance from the Old Testament saints, I will focus on becoming. There is a time to do, and there is a time to become.

There are trees that bring forth their fruit in their season, and the rest of the time, what are they doing? Repair, restoration, internal maintenance. Verse 25 is extremely important. It's right in the faithfulness to the faithful, which is verses 20-29.

Merciful, blameless, pure, verse 26. If you're twisty, if you're trying to game the system, if you're trying to say one thing and do another, or trying to be one thing and act another, God will show Himself to be twisty. Both of these words mean twisty.

You don't see it coming. Shrewdness, cunning, you faint with your left and you throw a right cross. You wave your hand up high and kick somebody in the shin.

That's the notion here. You distract someone and do something completely different. This is what sleight of hand is all about with magicians.

They want you to look one place while they're doing something sneaky. And God says, if you think you're going to fool me by expostulating and waving your hands, you haven't seen the unexpected until you've seen what God does. With the twisty, God will show Himself the master of the unexpected.

This is a good colloquial translation. God can shoot around corners. You will save the humble people but will bring down haughty looks.

James 4.6, God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. For lack of a better plan, if you're not sure what to do in a given situation, focus on and cultivate humility. Find ways to express and manifest and bear the fruit of humility.

Be gracious. Be loving. Be selfless.

Be humble. Look at the list of the fruit of the Spirit. Examine ourselves.

See if we're in the faith. Allow God to perform His perfect work in us. It is the fruit of the Spirit.

It's not the fruit of the spiritual man. So if we cultivate the presence and power of the Spirit, that spiritual fruit will be in evidence and self-control, humility are in that list. Verse 28, you will light my lamp.

The Lord God will enlighten my darkness. We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to pick up at verse 28 and push through to the end of this psalm and see what it is that happens when we just anticipate the final, ultimate victory of God on earth, when the earthquake actually takes place and the clouds and thick darkness actually appear, the repercussions of that reach across time, reach into our lives in the present, and what do they produce? That's what we'll see here when we come back.