**Warrior king, warrior God**  5/2/23 dkm

Read: 1Samuel 23:19-29, Psalm 18

Text: Psalm 18:1-19

Psalms: 97, 144:1-8, 76:7-12, 72old

Not long before I became minister of this church I attended a mission conference at a place called Weston-super-Mare in southwest England. On the weekend we visited Bath. On the way to Bath we drove past a huge rock where it is thought Augustus Toplady sheltered from a storm. After sheltering from a storm in a cleft in this rock he wrote the famous hymn, ‘Rock of Ages’. This experience became a metaphor for his finding shelter in the Lord Jesus Christ from the difficulties and afflictions that a Christian encounters in this world.

Augustus Toplady was not a military man as far as I know but David, the writer of this psalm, certainly was. David began life as a shepherd, a job that involved protecting sheep from lions and bears. After killing Goliath, he was taken into Saul’s army and fought many battles against the Philistines. But Saul got jealous and tried to kill David. He spent years on the run from Saul. Maybe the closest he came to being captured and killed by Saul was when he was surrounded at a mountain in Maon. When a messenger came telling Saul the Philistines were attacking, David saw his escape as an answer to prayer (1Sam 23:27).

The title of this psalm is not specific as to which ‘deliverance’ David is talking about, but it does tell us that David wrote this song when ‘the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul’. We believe the title to be an integral part of the psalm, but in any case, this psalm is found almost word for word in the Book of 2Samuel, where the title is again included (2Sam 22). It is song of victory like those found in Exodus. It is a song of thanksgiving to the Lord for delivering his covenant people from almost certain death at the hand of an enemy.

A brief word of explanation regarding the title I have given to this sermon. A lecturer at college kept referring to God as a ‘warrior God’; he was teaching on the psalms. I had not heard such a name for God before, but this is what we see in this psalm and in many others. We remember that David was a military man or warrior, who spent much of his life fighting in what was in those days hand to hand combat with spears, swords and shields. Cities had walls and were often on tops of hills- Jerusalem was a fortress city. Besides, when on the run from Saul, David lived in caves and strongholds in desert regions of Palestine.

David’s experience led to the metaphors he uses for God’s protecting and delivering him from his enemies. I think we can understand this military background even if we have not been in the army or experienced war. The apostle Paul was not in the army but probably saw Roman soldiers around the place. He uses military metaphors when urging us to stand against the schemes of the devil in Ephesians 6: ‘the shield of faith’ and ‘sword of the Spirit’. Psalm 18 is a rather long psalm, so today we will only look at verse 1-19. Our subheadings are, ‘Fortress and deliverer’, ‘Foundations shaken and uncovered’ and, ‘Plucked from danger’.

**1. Fortress and deliverer**

David begins by declaring his love for the Lord, a line not found in the 2Samuel version of this psalm. It is not the usual word for covenant love, but a word that expresses even deeper ‘motherly love’. This is a psalm of praise to the Lord for his powerful and wonderful deliverance from enemies. David had many enemies, not because he went around upsetting people but because he was a man who feared the Lord. Ministers of the gospel, if they are faithfully preaching the gospel, make enemies because people do not like being told they are sinners. Usually such people pack their bags and leave the church but some, by the grace of God, are brought to repentance and restored to fellowship with the Lord and with his people. Our relationship with the Lord is built upon confession of sin, forgiveness and ongoing trust in the Lord. David loved the Lord and trusted in the Lord.

David refers to the Lord in terms familiar to him from the time he spent on the run and on the battlefield: ‘My rock and my fortress’ and my shield, my stronghold, and the horn of my salvation (18:2). Rocks provide protection from most attacks, even from shells and mortars that are used today. The individual or army that occupied the hill and built a fortress there was difficult to drive out. David saw the Lord as his fortress and stronghold. He found strength in the Lord to stand against his enemies. He attributed his victory over Goliath to the Lord, as well as his victories or escapes from Saul.

The shield provides protection during hand to hand combat; again David sees the Lord as protecting him. The horn is a symbol of strength as seen on bulls. The Lord had protected David from his enemies on many occasions, and in this psalm and others he thanks the Lord for his protection and deliverance or salvation. David cried out to the Lord when he was in danger, and at other times of course, and he remembered to thank and praise the Lord when he was delivered (18:3).

Do you trust the Lord like David? Is God able to deliver you from all your enemies, all your troubles and all your fears? Or do you despair in the face of powerful men or the powers of this world. David goes on to see God’s almighty power in the forces of nature, natural events we continue to see in this world. Do you believe God can stop the storm? Do you believe God can stop Putin? Do you believe God can stop that bully at school, at work, or even in the church?

David did not go around laughing at death or rejoicing in his afflictions. He was afraid when surrounded by enemies who wanted him dead or in Sheol (18:4, 5). He was also afraid of storms and floods, although the reference here in verse 4 is to ‘floods of ungodliness’ or literally ‘of Belial’: the NIV has ‘torrents of destruction overwhelmed me’ (18:4). David did not ‘tempt death’ and nor should we. Jesus refused to throw himself from the temple simply to prove he was the Son of God (Luke 4:9).

It is natural for us to fear, but as a new creation in Jesus Christ it should also be natural for us to call upon the Lord as David did: ‘In my distress I called upon the Lord’ (18:6). He called upon the Lord with confidence that the Lord would hear. David was not a doubter; he prayed in faith to the all-powerful and all-loving God. The word of God is sharper than a two edged sword (Heb 4:12).

**2. Foundations shaken and uncovered**

David had no doubts about the power of the Lord to save him from his enemies because he had power to shake the earth itself (Heb 12:25f). The Lord is creator of heaven and earth, and continues to rule over his creation. David would have been aware of Samuel calling upon the Lord to send thunder and rain (1Sam 12:17), but what he describes here in verses 7-15 is probably a picture of Moses crossing the Red Sea and going up Mt Sinai. The Lord was angry with Pharaoh and drowned him and his army in the sea, which He had divided to save Moses and his people. David writes of the channels of the sea being seen and the foundations of the world being uncovered (18:15). When the Lord gets angry it is as if he blasts out from his nostrils powerful wind and lightning and thunder.

Mt Sinai shook when the Lord came down to meet with Moses. Earthquakes are terribly frightening and dangerous. Man with all his power and technology still cannot stop them. Nor can he stop volcanoes which are similarly powerful and dangerous. The people stood in fear of the Lord when they saw lightning and thunder, and smoke and fire on Mt Sinai. David understood, as those people did, that all this was a demonstration of the power of God as he came down, power to shake the earth, and speak through thunder and lightning (18:13). We still hear of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and terrible storms but do we see the hand of the Lord in such events? We hear about ‘extreme weather events’ and, ‘more extreme weather events’ but who is listening to the voice of God?

‘He rode upon a cherub and flew’ (18:10). This is a strange image to us- it largely comes from a vision given to Ezekiel (Ezek 1:4f). It is referring to the Lord coming down from heaven to save and to judge. God came down to save and to judge in the Lord Jesus Christ. Cherubs are attendants or protectors of the divine. They are pictured as carrying the throne of the Almighty. This royal throne came from a whirlwind in the vision given to Ezekiel. Dark clouds are associated with God protecting and guiding his people in the exodus and through the desert, a cloud by day and fire by night; ‘coals of fire’ are referred to by David (18:12).

Reflecting on and interpreting these natural events reminded David of just how awesome is the power of God. He knew God could shake the earth that we think is immovable, and divide the sea that some fear is rising and will devour us. When this God heard his cry for help, David had no doubt that he was in the most powerful hands in all the world. He knew the Lord could move heaven and earth to save him from his enemies. As one commentator writes, ‘Underlying these poetic words is the understanding that the Almighty will turn the universe inside out, if necessary, to deliver His servant’. Do you believe God loves you so much that he will turn the universe inside out to save you? He has done this of course, in sending his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross and save you from sin and death. Even at that time there was darkness over the land and an earthquake sent by the Lord.

**3. Plucked from danger**

What a difference aircraft have made to war these days. Underground bunkers become more important than rocks and fortresses. Moreover, helicopters are now a vital part of rescues, especially in floods or at sea. David did not see such rescues, but he did know that the Lord reached down and wonderfully saved him from his enemies (18:16). The way the Lord rescued him was as if he plucked him up and transported him to a safe place. The Lord ‘brought him out into a broad place’, a place of freedom from his enemies (18:19). The Lord could shake the earth, or divide the sea to deliver his chosen ones, but he could, in an equally awesome and wonderful way, simply reach down to pluck up an individual in whom he delighted.

When Jesus was baptised by John in the Jordan, as voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased’. Jesus is God’s Son whom he sent from heaven to rescue persons in whom he delights. In Jesus Christ we are lifted up to sit with him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:5). They say the Jordan is not a river you want to swim in these days. One summer in India was so hot I took a dip in the Ganges. I came out with a layer of mud (sewage) over me that took a long time to remove.

God sent Jesus to cleanse us of sin, to give us true life or life in abundance. Jesus said he came to set us free, to set us on the path of life. Do not be like the Jews who blindly and proudly said to Jesus, ‘We are not in bondage’, we are already free (John 8:33). This is like a drowning man saying to his rescuer lowered down from the chopper to save him, ‘I am fine; leave me alone’. Blindness to sin is the most serious and widespread malady of the human race. Yet the cure is close at hand. God is holding out the cure in his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.