

Psalm 18

30th Sunday of Ordinary Time Year A

31st Sunday of Ordinary Time Year B

verses 1-29: Office of Readings Wednesday Week 1

verses 30-50: Office of Readings Thursday Week 1

Facing certain death the psalmist cried out to YHWH who powerfully intervened and saved him. His enemies were put to flight and with God's strength he pursued them and cut them down. He sees God's action as a reward for his innocence. The psalm celebrates God's constant care for the Davidic dynasty (see verse 50). The title is unusually long. It reads: 'To the leader. A Psalm* of David the servant of YHWH, who addressed the words of this song to YHWH on the day when YHWH delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said:' This is quoted from 2Samuel 22 where this psalm can be found.

¹I love you, YHWH*, my strength!

This tender verb for love (Hebrew *rāham*, רָחַם) is found 4 times in the psalms, though on the other three occasions it refers to the tenderness of God's love for us. In the whole Bible, only here in Psalm 18 do we find it used of our love for God. See the article 'Compassion' in the Introduction. This verse is not found in 2Samuel 22. The psalmist goes on to list all that YHWH is for him.

**²YHWH, my rock,
my fortress,
and my escape!
My God,
my rock in whom I take refuge!
My shield,
my horn of deliverance*,
my bulwark.**

**³I praise you. I call upon you, YHWH,
and I am delivered* from my enemies.**

Part One

God has intervened to deliver the king from his oppressors

**⁴The waves of Death overwhelmed me;
the torrents of destruction struck me down;
⁵the cords of Sheol entangled me;
the nets of Death held me trapped.**

The king has been in situations from which there was no escape and where he was facing what appeared as certain death. However, as the following verses state, he cried to YHWH who came to his aid and saved him from death. He wants God to do the same again.

**⁶In my peril I called upon YHWH,
I cried out for help* to my God.
From his temple he heard my cry,
my scream for help pierced through to his presence
and he heard me.**

**⁷Then the earth reeled and trembled;
the mountains were shaken to their foundations,
they shuddered at his terrible anger*.**

**⁸Smoke issued from his nostrils, a scorching fire from his mouth;
and fiery rocks erupted.**

**⁹He tore open the heavens, and came down;
a black cloud under his feet.**

**¹⁰He rode on the back of a cherub;
he came swiftly upon the wings of the wind.**

**¹¹He made darkness his covering,
wrapped in a canopy of thick black storm clouds.**

**¹²Lightning announced his presence,
with hailstones and flashes of fire.**

**¹³YHWH thundered in the heavens,
the voice of the Most High resounded;
¹⁴he shot his arrows, and scattered them,
causing terror by the crashing of the lightning.**

**¹⁵Then the bottom of the ocean was revealed,
and the foundations of the world laid bare
at your rebuke, YHWH, at the fire issuing from your nostrils.**

The psalmist draws on the imagery of earthquake, volcanic eruption, violent storms with thunder and lightning to speak of the power of God's intervention to rescue the king, and as expressions of God's anger against the king's enemies. See the article 'Anger of God' in the Introduction. Similar imagery is found in the account of the giving of the Decalogue at Sinai:

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance.

– Exodus 20:18

You approached and stood at the foot of the mountain while the mountain was blazing up to the very heavens, shrouded in dark clouds.

– Deuteronomy 4:11

Mutual fidelity

**¹⁶You reached down from on high and seized me.
You drew me out of the mighty waters.
¹⁷You rescued me from powerful enemies,
from those who were too strong for me.
¹⁸They came against me on a disastrous day,
but YHWH sustained me.
¹⁹He gave me room to move.
He rescued me because he took pleasure in me.**

By divine power the king escaped capture. Compare the following:

Alas! that day is so great there is none like it; it is a time of distress for Jacob;
yet he shall be rescued from it.

– Jeremiah 30:7

Then they remembered the days of old, of Moses his servant.
Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea?

– Isaiah 63:11

You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married;
for YHWH delights in you, and your land shall be married.

– Isaiah 62:4

He relied on YHWH. Let YHWH save him.
Let him come to his aid if he loves him so much!

– Psalm 22:8

Part Two

The king has carried out his part of the covenant, and YHWH has been faithful to his.

**²⁰YHWH rewarded me because I was just*;
he repaid me because my actions were pure ,
²¹because I have kept the ways of YHWH,
and have not repudiated my God;
²²because I have kept present to me all his judgments* ,
and I have not set aside his statutes.
²³I kept blameless before him, and I guarded myself against all guilt* .
²⁴YHWH recompensed me for being just* ,
for keeping my actions pure in his sight.**

‘Statutes’ translates the Hebrew *hāqâ* [חֻקֵּי] meaning something carved (etched in stone).

**²⁵With the faithful you show your kindness*;
with the blameless you show yourself blameless;
²⁶with the pure you show yourself pure;
with the crooked you show yourself astute.
²⁷You give your saving help* to a people who have been brought low* ,
but those with haughty eyes you bring down.**

Part Three

Praise of God who has rescued the king

**²⁸It is you, YHWH, who light my lamp,
my God, you clear away my darkness.**

²⁹With you I can leap into the fray, with my God I can scale any wall.

**³⁰God, whose way is perfect, YHWH, whose word is pure,
is a shield for the person who takes refuge in him.**

³¹For who is God if not YHWH? Who is a rock if not our God?

Compare the following:

Therefore you are great, YHWH God;
for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you,
according to all that we have heard with our ears.

– 2Samuel 7:22

There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any deeds like yours.

– Psalm 86:8

Part Four.

God gives military victory to the king

**³²God, who girds me with strength and completes my way,
³³makes my feet like those of a deer,
sets me secure on the heights, [see Habakkuk 3:19]**

³⁴trains my hands for war and my arms to bend the heavy bow.

**³⁵You have given me your saving* shield,
your right hand has supported me, you have assisted me in every way.**

**³⁶You have widened the path for my steps,
and I have kept my footing.**

**³⁷I pursued the enemy and overtook them;
and did not turn back until they were annihilated.**

**³⁸I struck them down, so that they were not able to rise.
They fell under my feet.**

**³⁹For you girded me with strength for the battle;
you made my assailants fall down before me.**

**⁴⁰You put my enemies to flight,
and reduced to silence my adversaries.**

**⁴¹They cried for help*, but there was no one to save* them;
they cried to YHWH, but he did not answer them.**

**⁴²You crushed them fine as dust before the wind;
You trod them down like dirt in the streets.**

**⁴³You rescued me from the wrangling of my people.
You made me head of the nations.**

God's fidelity to his promises

**A foreign people took me as their lord,
44because of my fame they submitted to me.
Foreigners came cringing to me,
45foreigners lost heart,
and came trembling out of their strongholds.**

Conclusion

**46May YHWH live! Blessed* be my rock!
Be exalted my God and Saviour*!
47God, who avenged me and subdued peoples under me,
48who has rescued me from my enemy,
who has exalted me above my adversaries
and rescued me from the violent.
49For this I will extol you, YHWH, among the nations,
and sing praises to your name.
50You have given a great victory* to your king,
you show kindness* to your anointed*,
to David and his descendants forever.**

Paul quotes verse 49 in Romans 15:9. The reference to YHWH's 'anointed' (see the article in the Introduction) recalls the promise made to David, a promise intended for the people:

Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.
See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.
See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of YHWH your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

– Isaiah 55:3-5

The New Testament speaks of God exalting Jesus in terms reminiscent of this psalm:

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

– Hebrews 5:7

God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.

– Philippians 2:9

He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first born from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

– Colossians 1:18

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

– Ephesians 1:20-23