

The King's Response to God's Salvation

Psalm 18:1-50

Halifax: 7 January 2007

Introduction:

In our Matthew sermon series, we have now completed Matthew 24.

- There we saw how our Lord Jesus announced two coming judgements.
 - The first of these judgements was the judgement that He would bring upon Jerusalem for rejecting Him as Messiah.
 - It was a judgement that was to come in that very generation, which it did, bringing completed destruction to the temple by 70 AD.
 - The second judgement was the judgement that would come at the personal return of the LORD at the end of the world...
 - The time of this judgement is not revealed to anyone.
 - It will come as a thief in the night—unexpectedly and without warning.
- In Matthew 25, which I plan to begin next week,
 - the LORD Jesus continues to speak about this final judgement at the end of the age and to warn us to always be ready because we do not know when He will come.
 - He is insistent that every one will be summoned to this judgement.
 - You will have to give an account of yourself to the LORD, and if you have not repented and turned to Jesus in faith, it will not go well with you.
 - But if you are found in Christ on that day,
 - you will at last see His glory and enter into His eternal blessing!

In accordance with our usual practice,

- I have selected a Psalm for us to focus on as we take up the study of Matthew 25.
 - The Psalm is Psalm 18.
 - It is a very long song—fifty verses in fact...
 - Rather than sing the whole thing each week, we will focus in particular on the middle portion of this Psalm—Psalm 18 C & D in our Psalter.
 - This is the portion of the Psalm that particularly corresponds to Matthew 25 when it speaks about how it is the LORD's way to reward the righteous and punish the wicked:
 - As our Psalter says in 18-D (verse 25),

- “To gracious men you gracious are;
The perfect you perfection show;
The pure you show that you are pure;
Your cunning will the crafty know.
A humble people you lift up;
but haughty eyes you humble low.”
- It will be this central portion of the Psalm that we will sing over the next few weeks,
 - but today, I want to look at Psalm 18 as a whole so we can understand how this whole Psalm fits together and applies to us.
- And by way of introduction,
 - I want to remind you all about the covenantal nature of the Psalms.
 - Now you are probably saying to yourself,
 - “Oh know, the covenantal nature...”
 - “there’s that word *covenant* again, whatever that means.”
 - But let me explain what I mean by that...
 - I simply mean that we must sing this Psalm as those who are one with Jesus Christ.
 - God Himself has made us members of His body so that we who believe come before God as a body of people who are one—who are in solidarity with Jesus.
 - Just as marriage is a covenant that binds together a man and a woman to make them one family,
 - so God has established a covenant with His people so that we are bound together with Jesus as one body.
 - That means that we are not in isolation, but have everything in common with Jesus...
 - When we come to God in our covenant relationship with Jesus,
 - He can sing Psalms with us that confess sin—not because He has any sin of His own as an individual,
 - but because He is part of a body that has sin.
 - And likewise,
 - we can sing about our righteousness—not as individuals,
 - but the righteousness we have as members of the body whose sin Christ has atoned for and whose obedience has been accepted as the obedience of the whole body!

- You see, Jesus is the One member of the body who makes all the difference!
 - Because we are joined to Him in the Covenant of Grace,
 - we are made perfectly righteous!
 - God has accepted His offering for our sin and His obedience in behalf of the whole body.
- And so you see that what applies to one applies to all as members of the same body.
 - I don't mean to say that our individuality is obliterated.
 - It is not—we will all be judged as individuals and rewarded as individuals...
 - But our judgement will be altogether different if we, as an individual, are found in Christ in whom there is no condemnation...
 - or apart from Him apart from whom there is no salvation and where God's wrath remains.
 - In other words, without Christ, I have no righteousness and no hope of salvation to sing about...
 - but in Him, I have firm assurance of blessing because Jesus has taken away my sins.
 - You cannot rightly sing this Psalm, or any of the others,
 - unless you sing it with a covenantal consciousness that you are in Christ, joined to Him through faith.
- With this in mind, let me give you an overview of my sermon this morning...
 - I intend to draw your attention to three things in this Psalm:

I. First, the King's commitment to worship the God of His salvation.

- His commitment is expressed in the introduction (v. 1-3) and the conclusion (v. 46-50).
 - We will look at this first, understanding that His commitment is also our commitment as members of His body.

II. Secondly, the King's testimony of God's gracious saving work.

- His testimony of God's gracious saving work is also found in two places...
 - It is found in verses 4-19 and again in verses 28-45.
 - Again, we will look at His testimony as our testimony—as those covenantally united to Him.

TRANS> Thirdly, we will look at:

III. The King's assurance that God will accept Him because of His righteousness.

- His assurance of God's acceptance is found in the middle of the Psalm...
 - In verses 20-27.
 - This assurance we will look at as also our assurance as those who are looking to King Jesus.

Consider then, in the first heading...

I. The King's commitment to worship the God of His salvation.

A. In the introduction (verses 1-3) we find three commitments or resolutions:

1. In verse one, He says:
 - "I will love you, O LORD, my strength."
 - a. The word *love* used here is one of great intimacy and tenderness that is often used of God's compassion and pity for us...
 - It speaks of the kind of love that is willing to sacrifice for the one loved because it is so full of affection.
 - It is the love Jesus had for the Father when He went to the cross and clung to Him as His strength and support.
 - b. This is the kind of love He calls all the members of His body to have...
 - It is the love He is working in you by His Spirit...
 - It is the kind of love that you will have to perfection in heaven...
 - One of the greatest things about heaven is that we will have this great affection and delight in God that is often clouded by sin and blindness now.
2. In verse 2, we find His second commitment...
 - He says that He will trust the LORD.
 - He will trust Him because He is, He says,
 - "My rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength... My shield and the horn of My salvation, my stronghold."
 - Brothers and sisters, our God is absolutely reliable...
 - You can safely bank everything on Him—cast all your care on Him.
 - And you have every reason to do so with an absolute confidence and assurance that nothing will be lost.

- with absolute security and peace knowing that everything is in His kind, wise, and powerful hands!
- I don't have to grasp for this and that as a little pawn in a huge sea,
 - but I can safely trust that no evil will come to Me if I am resting in Him.
- I can endure my cross (as Jesus did), because of the joy to which it will surely lead under God's good hand.
 - I can, as it were, fully trust the surgeon's knife.

3. And thirdly, in verse 3, He says that He will call upon the LORD.

- This is a commitment to pray—
 - Prayer is the natural expression of the trust in verse 2 and carries with it the assurance that you will be saved from you enemies.

TRANS> This is the king's commitment to worship as found in the introduction to Ps 18—

- He will love the LORD, He will trust Him, and He will call upon Him...
 - In the body of the Psalm, (which we look at in a moment),
 - the King recounts all the reasons He has to love the LORD and to trust in Him and to call upon Him...
 - And then, have recounted all the reasons,

B. He vows to praise Him in verse 49, saying:

- Psalm 18:49: "Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the Gentiles, And sing praises to Your name."

1. The word translated "give thanks" is *hdy* (yaw-daw) in Hebrew.

- a. This word properly means "to confess," but when speaking of confessing God's name and God's works,
 - it is often translated by the English word "praise" or "give thanks."
 - That is what you do when you confess the Lord's person and work...
 - You can't describe Him without it coming forth as praise because if you speak of Him in truth, it is all praise!
 - And if you belong to Him, you can't speak of His works without it being a kind of thanksgiving—
 - when you begin to list all that He had done, you find indeed that He has worked all things for good concerning you!

- b. I have often spoken to you about how our LORD Jesus, after God accepted His offering for our sins and raised Him from the dead,
 - was delighted to come to us and announce what God had done!
 - With joy, He sent His servants into the world to declare the God news that His sacrifice has been accepted for the forgiveness of our sins!
 - He sent them to call the world to come and trust in this glorious salvation that is now accomplished!

TRANS And what was His goal in declaring this among the nations?

- 2. He desires to see the whole world erupt with praise!
 - a. He calls us together each Lord's Day from every nation to confess what God has done—
 - to praise Him and to give thanks to Him!
 - This is how He sings praises among the nations.
 - b. He wants the world to know that the LORD lives!
 - He wants us to say, "Blessed be my Rock!"
 - He wants us to testify of God's marvellous deliverance,
 - how He avenges us and how he subdues our enemies under us!

TRANS> And it is the testimony of this gracious saving work of God that fills the body of this psalm!

- Let us now turn to consider what this work is that God has done and is doing!
- Let us consider now as our second heading:

II. The King's testimony of God's gracious saving work.

- This testimony has two parts...
 - The first part is found in verses 4-19 and speaks of the LORD:

A. As the rescuer of the helpless.

- 1. This section opens in verses 4-6 with the King crying out to God because death has closed in upon Him:
 - a. He says:
 - Psalm 18:4-6: The pangs of death surrounded me, And the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, even to His ears.

- b. This was the kind of situation David experienced when Saul was in hot pursuit of him, trying to take His life.
 - 1) It was not a time when David was authorised to fight back—
 - There were times he might have killed Saul, but Saul was God’s anointed and it was not David’s place to attack him...
 - Instead, He committed the whole matter to the LORD and left it with Him.
 - 2) This is the same situation Jesus Christ our King was in when He went to the cross...
 - a) His wicked enemies had arrested Him and had put Him there on false charges...
 - but it was not His calling to resist them or to command His angels to destroy them.
 - Peter tells us that instead,
 - 1 Peter 2:23: when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.
 - b) There He was on the cross—representing us—bearing the sins of all His people!
 - He was not called to fight or resist at that time...
 - He had to leave the matter with God to vindicate Him and to deliver Him.
 - In Him, the whole church hung on the cross, waiting for the Father to be propitiated,
 - waiting for His wrath and justice to be satisfied.

TRANS> But just look how the Father reacts to the king’s cry in verses 7-15!

- 2. He reacts with an earth shaking response!
 - a. See how it is described in verse 7 and following...
 - It begins like this:
 - Psalm 18:7-9: 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. He bowed the heavens also, and came down With darkness under His feet.
 - The whole cosmos is disturbed.

- b. What passion! What zeal the LORD has for His servant in distress!
 - Brothers and sisters, this is our gracious LORD with burning jealousy acting for the salvation of His people!
 - The LORD of glory Himself crying out His Father for deliverance and the Father acting in His behalf!
 - By Him, the curse was overturned for all of His people!
 - The Father heard His cry and acted for Him for our salvation!
3. The result was the glorious rescue of the King.
- a. This is described in verses 16-19:
 - Psalm 18:16-19: 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. 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.
 - b. The eternal chains that we had forged by our transgressions were shattered and we were set free when He was raised...
 - We were released from our bondage to sin, Satan and death!
 - Glory to God in the highest!
 - c. Jesus Christ faced all these enemies as one weak and helpless, as a mortal man, subjected to death...
 - He joined Himself to us and to our desperate condition as our priest, and then besought God's mercy for our sakes....
 - And God heard Him because He delighted in Him.
 - Jesus did not exert His own power on the cross,
 - but He entrusted Himself wholly to the Father to deliver Him.

TRANS> If you look over this section,

- you see that it is about God's rescue of the one who is unable to deliver Himself.
 - God's deliverance in this case is not in giving His servant power so that the servant might destroy his enemies,
 - but it is in drawing Him out of waters of death and rescuing Him.

4. There is a very important lesson here...

- a. Namely, that there are times when we are not called to fight at all,
 - but to stand still and see the salvation of the LORD.

- This is true of attaining forgiveness of sin and release from death...
- b. God doesn't call you or give you the ability to atone for you sins...
- You can do great deeds for Him, you can give your body to be burned, you can give all you have to the poor, you can beat your chest and shed rivers of tears...
 - but there is nothing you can do to atone for your sins—nothing by your own work...
 - In fact, it is an insult to God for you to even try—to bring such trifles before Him as though they could atone for sin!
- c. You are called rather to trust the LORD who has provided for your forgiveness through the cross.
- You are to cry out to Him for mercy through Christ alone!
 - You are to say with the poet,
 - “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling!
Naked, come to thee for dress; helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul I to the Fountain fly; wash me, Saviour, or I die.”

TRANS> And so you see that the testimony of our deliverance in verses 4-19 is the testimony of God's rescue when we are passive.

- But in verses 28-45, we have the King's testimony of the gracious saving work of our LORD that is not passive...
- Here, in verses 28-45, we find Him:

B. As the enabler of the weak— as the one who makes the King strong...

1. In verses 28-36, see how He is empowered by God to conquer His enemies.
 - a. This is the testimony of one whom God has made invincible!
 - 1) In verse 28, he speaks of being made alive—this is a resurrection from death and helplessness!
 - 2) In verse 29, he says that he is able to run against a troop and to leap over a wall by God's grace.
 - 3) In verse 34, he explains that the LORD has taught him to make war so that he can bend a bow of bronze!

TRANS> This is the testimony that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

- b. If the previous section referred to David in the days of Saul, when he was passive,

- This refers to him after he had been established on the throne and was given power to conquer his enemies for the LORD.
- With Saul, David was not called to fight but to entrust himself to the LORD,
 - but after he became king, he was called to execute the LORD's judgement as his minister...
 - He went forth as God's agent to destroy His enemies and the enemies of Israel

1) And this points to our Lord Jesus after His resurrection...

- When He was exalted to sit at God's right hand...
 - and "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him."
- This is when He sent His servants into the world by the power of the Spirit to bring the world under His feet... to take dominion for Him...
 - And even more it speaks of His glorious second coming when He will not be passive,
 - but armed of divine power to destroy all His enemies and establish perfect righteousness and peace in the earth.

2) This pertains to all of us...

- The Lord calls us to be passive when it comes to atoning for our sins,
 - but He calls us to exert ourselves by His enabling grace when it comes to sanctification.
- Paul describes sanctification, both corporate and individual, as running and as fighting and as striving against sin.
 - It is all of God's grace that we are able to fight and to overcome,
 - but we are not to wait for Him to part the Red Sea as we did at our conversion...
 - We are to march into the Land of Promise with Joshua leading us and fight with all our strength by the enabling grace of God!
 - We are to go to the field with our slingshot and bring down Goliath!
 - The LORD will make us invincible!
 - At the last day, His grace will so work in us that we will be done with sin forever!

2. The King will conquer all His enemies by God's enabling grace.

- a. In verse 37-42, we see how He pursues them until the job is complete...
- 1) He is not like Israel who only partially finished the job of subduing the land of promise...
 - He is not like Saul who only partially destroyed the Amalikites when the LORD told him to utterly destroy them...
 - He is not like the church who only partially reforms,
 - or like each one of us who destroy certain sins by God's grace but leave many others unharmed...
 - or like we are when go out to win the nations and become discouraged and surrender!
 - 2) No, the king goes forth by God's grace until all His enemies are brought under His feet...
 - As verse 37 says,
 - I have pursued my enemies and overtaken them; Neither did I turn back again till they were destroyed."
 - And verse 42:
 - Then I beat them as fine as the dust before the wind; I cast them out like dirt in the streets.
 - The LORD Jesus will not turn back from the battle until all unrighteousness is subdued.
- b. Our King's testimony (and our testimony in Him) will be that of verse 43-45:
- Psalm 18:43-45: You have delivered me from the strivings of the people; You have made me the head of the nations; A people I have not known shall serve me. As soon as they hear of me they obey me; The foreigners submit to me. The foreigners fade away, And come frightened from their hideouts.
 - Everything will, by God's enabling grace, be brought under Christ.
 - At the end of the age, He will summon them forth in terror from the hiding places to judge them.
 - And there will be a great multitude from the nations that will be found joyfully serving Him.

TRANS> So here you see the testimony of the King concerning God's gracious saving work—

- first, that gracious work of forgiveness through the cross...
- and secondly, that gracious work of enablement to bring all His enemies under His feet.

- But how is it that the king is so certain of this work?
 - What is the basis of His assurance?
- Well let us see thirdly...

III. The King's assurance that God will accept Him because of His righteousness.

- This testimony is given in verses 21-27.
- A. In verses 21-24, the King testifies that He has been blessed because of His righteousness!
1. Look at it. This is exactly what He says!
 - Psalm 18:21-24: For I have kept the ways of the LORD, And have not wickedly departed from my God. For all His judgments were before me, And I did not put away His statutes from me. I was also blameless before Him, And I kept myself from my iniquity. Therefore the LORD has recompensed me according to my righteousness, According to the cleanness of my hands in His sight.
 2. What is this??? works salvation?
 - a. Indeed it is, but this need not trouble you.
 - 1) If you are a believer, you would say,
 - “But I am not saved on the basis of works...
 - The Apostle Paul is very plain about this...
 - He is forever saying things like Titus 3:5:
 - ‘not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.’
 - How can I sing in verse 24 that the LORD has “recompensed me **according to my righteousness?**”
 - 2) You certainly can't say that as an individual, but remember, this is a covenant song.
 - You can say this as one joined to Jesus Christ.
 - Paul also says very plainly that at the end, he wants to:
 - Phil 3:9: be found in Him [in Jesus], not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;
 - Jesus our King has achieved righteousness by works,
 - not only for Himself, but for all who believe in Him.
 - His whole body—all those who trust in Him from age to age—are righteous in God's sight because of Him.

- He came to us a sinful people with a debt we could not pay...
 - and He, out of His infinite resources paid it all!
- b. What confidence this ought to give all of you who have come to Jesus of your acceptance!
- 1) The LORD does not have to act with injustice to accept you and to bless you and to reward you...
 - a) In yourself, you are worthy of condemnation...
 - But you who have fled to Jesus for salvation are no longer in yourself...
 - You are no longer alone.
 - You are in Christ Jesus and He has made us all righteous by the riches of righteousness he brought into the church!
 - b) The Lord does not need to lay aside His justice to reward us...
 - Now that Christ has come and paid our sin, it would unjust for the Father to punish us!
 - That would be to punish sin twice...
 - That is our confidence in Christ...
 - The LORD will not punish sin twice...
 - He has already punished Jesus for our sins and He will not punish us again.
 - 2) Now you can be sure that this was the righteousness that David was trusting in as well...
 - a) For David, keeping God's way meant that he waited for God's promise to provide a sacrifice to take away his sin...
 - David came to the altar with the blood of bulls and goats offered up by the priest to atone for his sin...
 - And he knew that these were in token of God's provision for His sin... of the sacrifice that the LORD would provide.
 - b) By speaking of his own righteousness, he did not mean that he had merit apart from God's promised provision...
 - David's righteousness did not consist in perfect obedience, but rather in keeping God's covenant for sinners...
 - which covenant involves trusting in God's promised provision to take away our sin.

- Because David continued in faith, he had confidence that God would accept him.
- 3) So it is for you, only, now you have the advantage because you can see what Christ has done!
- David looked into a shadowy future, but for you it is clear history!
 - You see the Son of God on the cross!
 - Your righteousness is not in your own works, for you have sinned and come short of God's requirement...
 - But your righteousness is in keeping God's covenant that calls you to rest in what Jesus has done for you...
 - To look to His perfect life and to His perfect sacrifice for your sins...
 - He is the Lord and Saviour, and our life is hidden in Him.

TRANS> It is on this basis that you can have certainty on the Day of Judgement that God will accept you...

B. Verse 25-27 remind us that it is the Lord's character to deal in justice...

1. He will truly render to each according to his works...
 - Psalm 18:25-27: With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful; With a blameless man You will show Yourself blameless; With the pure You will show Yourself pure; And with the devious You will show Yourself shrewd. For You will save the humble people, But will bring down haughty looks.
 - The LORD is a righteous judge and He will only do what is right.
2. If you have the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus...
 - If you have come to Christ and are trusting in Him...
 - If you have received His Spirit through faith and are bearing the fruits of the Spirit,
 - You can be absolutely certain that God's salvation is yours.
 - To be otherwise would be to deny His very own nature!
3. God has accepted the work of King Jesus for our sake...
 - Jesus did not go to the cross for His own sins, but to atone for ours...
 - If God has accepted Him (and He has),
 - we can be certain that He has accepted everyone who belongs to Him.

Conclusion

- And so you see why our King, King Jesus, speaks of the salvation of the LORD as the “great deliverance He gives to His King! in verse 50”
 - There is no deliverance like this deliverance!
 - Our God rescued us from death when we were helpless and now He will enable us to overcome all our enemies.
 - There is nothing uncertain about it!
 - He shows mercy to His anointed and His seed forevermore!

- If you are trusting in Christ,
 - God’s judgement is something to look forward to with eager anticipation...
 - It is then that God’s mercy will come to you in all its fullness!

- But if you are not trusting in Christ,
 - I urge you to do so at once!
 - Without Him, you have nothing but certain destruction awaiting you in that day.
 - You have made the very One whose purpose it is to restore us to God your enemy by rejecting His work...
 - The work He performed at so great a cost because of His great love for His Father...
 - And to you the Father is so despised that you will not accept of that work.
 - He will indeed cast you out like dust in the streets if you will not repent.